

THE THREE DEVILS:  
LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S  
*WITH OTHER ESSAYS.*



# THE THREE DEVILS:

LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S.

WITH

*OTHER ESSAYS.*

BY

DAVID MASSON, M.A., LL.D.,

*Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh.*

London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1874.

LONDON :  
R. OLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,  
BREAD STREET HILL.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

THE first five of the following Essays are reprinted from the Author's *Essays Biographical and Critical: chiefly on English Poets*, published in 1856. The present Volume and two similar Volumes issued separately (under the titles "*Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and other Essays*" and "*Chatterton: A Story of the Year 1770*") may be taken together as forming a new and somewhat enlarged edition of the older book. The addition in the present Volume consists of the last Essay.

EDINBURGH :

*November 1874.*

## CONTENTS.

### I.

	PAGE
THE THREE DEVILS: LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S . . .	1

### II.

SHAKESPEARE AND GOETHE . . . . .	61
----------------------------------	----

### III.

MILTON'S YOUTH . . . . .	125
--------------------------	-----

### IV.

DRYDEN AND THE LITERATURE OF THE RESTORATION . . .	153
--	-----

### V.

DEAN SWIFT . . . . .	235
----------------------	-----

### VI.

HOW LITERATURE MAY ILLUSTRATE HISTORY . . . . .	301
---	-----

THE THREE DEVILS :  
LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S.



## THE THREE DEVILS:

LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S.<sup>1</sup>

LUTHER, Milton, and Goethe: these are very strange names to bring together. It strikes us, however, that the effect may not be uninteresting if we connect the names of those three great men, as having each represented to us the Principle of Evil, and each represented him in a different way. Each of the three has left on record his conception of a great accursed being, incessantly working in human affairs, and whose function it is to produce evil. There is nothing more striking about Luther than the amazing sincerity of his belief in the existence of such an evil being, the great general enemy of mankind, and whose specific object, in Luther's time, it was to resist Luther's movement, and, if possible, "cut his soul out of God's mercy." What was Luther's exact conception of this being is to

<sup>1</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, Dec. 1844.

---

be gathered from his life and writings. Again, we have Milton's Satan. Lastly, we have Goethe's Mephistopheles. Nor is it possible to confound the three, or for a moment to mistake the one for the other. They are as unlike as it is possible for three grand conceptions of the same thing to be. May it not, then, be profitable to make their peculiarities and their differences a subject of study? Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles have indeed been frequently contrasted in a vague, antithetic way; for no writer could possibly give a description of Goethe's Mephistopheles without saying something or other about Milton's Satan. The exposition, however, of the difference between the two has never been sufficient; and it may give the whole speculation greater interest if, in addition to Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles, we include Luther's Devil. It is scarcely necessary to premise that here there is to be no theological discussion. All that we propose is to compare, as we find them, three very striking delineations of the Evil Principle, one of them experimental, the other two poetical.

These last words indicate one respect in which, it will be perceived at the outset, Luther's conception of the Evil Principle on the one hand and Milton's and Goethe's on the other are fundamentally distinguishable. All the three, of course, are founded on the Scriptural

proposition of the existence of a being whose express function it is to produce evil. Luther, firmly believing every jot and tittle of Scripture, believed the proposition about the Devil also ; and so the whole of his experience of evil in himself and others was cast into the shape of a verification of that proposition. Had he started without such a preliminary conception, his experience would have had to encounter the difficulty of expressing itself in some other way ; which, it is likely, would not have been nearly so effective, or so Luther-like. Milton, too, borrows the elements of his conception of Satan from Scripture. The Fallen Angel of the Bible is the hero of *Paradise Lost* ; and one of the most striking things about this poem is that in it we see the grand imagination of the poet blazing in the very track of the propositions of the theologian. And, though there can be no doubt that Goethe's Mephistopheles is conceived less in the spirit of Scripture than either Milton's Satan or Luther's Devil, still even in Mephistopheles we discern the lineaments of the same traditional being. All the three, then, have this in common—that they are founded on the Scriptural proposition of the existence of an accursed being whose function it is to produce evil, and that, more or less, they adopt the Scriptural account of that being. Still, as we have said, Luther's conception of this being belongs to one category ; Milton's and Goethe's to

another. Luther's is a biographical phenomenon ; Milton's and Goethe's are literary performances. Luther illustrated the Evil Being of Scripture to himself by means of his personal experience. Whatever resistance he met with, whatever obstacle to Divine grace he found in his own heart or in external circumstances, whatever event he saw plainly cast in the way of the progress of the Gospel, whatever outbreak of a bad or unamiable spirit occurred in the Church, whatever strange phenomenon of nature wore a malevolent aspect,—out of that he obtained a clearer notion of the Devil. In this way it might be said that Luther was all his life gaining a deeper insight into the Devil's character. On the other hand, Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles are poetical creations, the one epic, the other dramatic. Borrowing the elements of his conception from Scripture, Milton set himself to the task of describing the ruined Archangel as he may be supposed to have existed at that epoch of the creation when he had hardly decided his own function, as yet warring with the Almighty, or, in pursuit of a gigantic scheme of revenge, travelling from star to star. Poetically assuming the device of the same Scriptural proposition, Goethe set himself to the task of representing the Spirit of Evil as he existed six thousand years later, no longer gifted with the same powers of locomotion, or struggling for admission into this part of the

universe, but plying his understood function in crowded cities and on the minds of individuals.

So far as the mere fact of Milton's having made Satan the hero of his epic, or of Goethe's having made Mephistopheles a character in his drama, qualifies us to speak of the theological opinions of the one or of the other, we are not entitled to say that either Milton or Goethe believed in a Devil at all as Luther did. Or, again, it is quite conceivable that Milton might have believed in a Devil as sincerely as Luther did, and that Goethe might have believed in a Devil as sincerely as Luther did also, and yet that, in that case, the Devil which Milton believed in might not have been the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*, and the Devil which Goethe believed in might not have been the Mephistopheles of *Faust*. Of course, we have other means of knowing whether Milton did actually believe in the existence of the great accursed being whose fall he sings. It is also plain that Goethe's Mephistopheles resembles Luther's Devil more than Milton's Satan does in this respect—that Mephistopheles is the expression of a great deal of Goethe's actual observation of life and experience in human affairs. Still, neither the fact, on the one hand, that Milton did believe in the existence of the Evil Spirit, nor the fact, on the other, that Mephistopheles is an expression for the aggregate of much profound thinking on the part of Goethe, is of force to obliterate

---

the fundamental distinction between Luther's Devil, as a biographical reality, and Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles, as two literary performances. If we might risk summing up under the light of this preliminary distinction, perhaps the following would be near the truth:—Luther had as strong a faith as ever man had in the existence and activity of the Evil Spirit of Scripture: he used to recognise the operation of this Spirit in every individual instance of evil as it occurred; he used, moreover, to conceive that this Spirit and he were personal antagonists; and so, just as one man forms to himself a distinct idea of the character of another man to whom he stands in an important relation, Luther came to form to himself a distinct idea of the Devil, and what this idea was it seems possible to find out by examining his writings. Milton, again, chose the Scripture personage as the hero of an epic poem, and employed his grand imagination in realizing the Scripture narrative: we have reason also to know that he did actually believe in the Devil's existence; and it agrees with what we know of Milton's character to suppose that the Devil thus believed in would be pretty much the same magnificent being he has described in his poem—though, on the whole, we should not say that Milton was a man likely to carry about with him, in daily affairs, any constant recognition of the Devil's presence. Lastly, Goethe, adopting, for a different

literary effect, the Scriptural and traditional account of the same being, conceived his Mephistopheles. This Mephistopheles, there is no doubt, had a real allegoric meaning with Goethe; he meant him to typify the Evil Spirit in modern civilization; but whether Goethe did actually believe in the existence of a supernatural intelligence whose function it is to produce evil is a question which no one will feel himself called upon to answer, although, if he did, it may be unhesitatingly asserted that this supernatural intelligence cannot have been Mephistopheles.

From all this it appears that Luther's conception of the Evil Being belongs to one category, Milton's and Goethe's to another. Let us consider, *first*, Milton's Satan, *secondly*, Goethe's Mephistopheles, and, *thirdly*, Luther's Devil.

The difficulties which Milton had to overcome in writing his *Paradise Lost* were immense. The gist of those difficulties may be defined as consisting in this, that the poet had at once to represent a supernatural condition of being and to construct a story. He had to describe the ongoings of Angels, and at the same time to make one event follow another. It is comparatively easy for Milton to sustain his conception of those superhuman beings as mere objects or phenomena —to represent them flying singly through space like

---

huge black shadows, or standing opposite to each other in hostile battalions ; but to construct a story in which these beings should be the agents, to exhibit these beings thinking, scheming, blundering, in such a way as to produce a likely succession of events, was enormously difficult. The difficulty was to make the course of events correspond with the reputation of the objects. To do this perfectly was literally impossible. It is possible for the human mind to conceive twenty-four great supernatural beings existing together at any given moment in space ; but it is utterly impossible to conceive what would occur among those twenty-four beings during twenty-four hours. The value of time, the amount of history that can be transacted in a given period, depends on the nature and prowess of the beings whose volitions make the chain of events ; and so a lower order of beings can have no idea at what rate things happen in a higher. The mode of causation will be different from that with which they are acquainted.

This is the difficulty with which Milton had to struggle ; or, rather, this is the difficulty with which he did not struggle. He had to construct a narrative ; and so, while he represents to us the full stature of his superhuman beings as mere objects or phenomena, he does not attempt to make events follow each other at a higher rate among those beings than they do amongst ourselves, except in the single respect of their being

infinitely more powerful physical agents than we are. Whatever feeling of inconsistency is experienced in reading the *Paradise Lost* may be traced, perhaps, to the fact that the necessities of the story obliged the poet not to attempt to make the rate of causation among those beings as extraordinary as his description of them as phenomena. Such a feeling of inconsistency there is ; and yet Milton sustains his flight as nobly as mortal could have done. Throughout the whole poem we see him recollecting his original conception of Satan as an object :—

“ Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,  
With head uplift above the waves, and eyes  
That sparkling blazed ; his other parts besides,  
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,  
Lay floating many a rood.”

And this is a great thing to have done. If the poet ever flags in his conception of those superhuman beings as objects, it is when he finds it necessary to describe a multitude of them assembled together in some *place* ; and his usual device then is to reduce the bulk of the greatest number. This, too, is for the behoof of the story. If it is necessary, for instance, to assemble the Angels to deliberate, this must be done in an audience-hall, and the human mind refuses to go beyond certain limits in its conception of what an audience-hall is. Again the

gate of Hell is described, although the Hell of Milton is a mere vague extent of fiery element, which, in strict keeping, could not be described as having a gate. The narrative, however, requires the conception. And so in other cases. Still, consistency of description is well sustained.

Nor is it merely as objects or phenomena that Milton sustains throughout his whole poem a consistent conception of the Angels. He is likewise consistent in his description of them as physical agents. Lofty stature and appearance carry with them a promise of so much physical power; and hence, in Milton's case, the necessity of finding words and figures capable of expressing modes and powers of mechanical action, on the part of the Angels, as superhuman as the stature and appearance he has given to them. This complicated his difficulties very much. It is quite conceivable that a man should be able to describe the mere appearance of a gigantic being standing up, as it were, with his back to a wall, and yet utterly break down, and not be able to find words, when he tried to describe this gigantic being stepping forth into colossal activity and doing some characteristic thing. Milton has overcome the difficulty. His conception of the Angels as physical agents does not fall beneath his conception of them as mere objects. In his description, for instance, in the sixth book, of the Angels tearing up mountains by the

---

roots and flinging them upon each other, we have strength suggested corresponding to the reputed stature of the beings. In extension of the same remark, we may observe how skilfully Milton has aggrandized and eked out his conception of the superhuman beings he is describing by endowing them with the power of infinitely swift motion through space. On this point we offer our readers an observation which they may verify for themselves:—Milton, we are persuaded, had it vaguely in his mind, throughout *Paradise Lost*, that the bounding peculiarity between the human condition of being and the angelic one he is describing is the law of gravitation. We, and all that is cognisable by us, are subject to this law; but Creation may be peopled with beings who are not subject to it, and to us these beings are as if they were not. But, whenever one of those beings becomes cognisable by us, he instantly becomes subject to gravitation; and he must resume his own mode of being ere he can be free from its consequences. The Angels were not subject to gravitation; that is to say, they had the means of moving in any direction at will. When they rebelled, and were punished by expulsion from Heaven, they did not *fall* out; for, in fact, so far as the description intimates, there existed no planet, no distinct material element, towards which they could gravitate. They were *driven* out by a pursuing fire. Then, after their fall, they had the power of rising

---

upward, of navigating space, of quitting Hell, directing their flight to one glittering planet, alighting on its rotund surface, and then bounding off again, and away to another. A corollary of this fundamental difference between the human condition of being and the angelic would be that angels are capable of direct vertical action, whereas men are capable mainly of horizontal. An army of men can exist only as a square, or other plane figure, whereas an army of angels can exist as a cube or parallelopiped.

Now, in everything relating to the physical action of the Angels, even in carrying out this notion of their mode of being, Milton is most consistent. But it was impossible to follow out the superiority of these beings to its whole length. The attempt to do so would have made a narrative impossible. Exalting our conception of these beings as mere objects, or as mere physical agents, as much as he could, it would have been suicidal in the poet to attempt to realize history as it must be among such beings. No human mind could do it. He had, therefore, except where the notion of physical superiority assisted him, to make events follow each other just as they would in a human narrative. The motives, the reasonings, the misconceptions of those beings, all that determined the succession of events, he had to make substantially human. The whole narrative, for instance, proceeds on the supposition that those

supernatural beings had no higher degree of knowledge than human beings, with equal physical advantages, would have had under similar circumstances. Credit the spirits with a greater degree of insight—credit them even with such a strong conviction of the Divine omnipotence as, in their reputed condition of being, we can hardly conceive them not attaining—and the whole of Milton's story is rendered impossible. The crushing conviction of the Divine omnipotence would have prevented them from rebelling with the alleged motive; or, after they had rebelled, it would have prevented them from struggling with the alleged hope. In *Paradise Lost* the working notion which the devils have about God is exactly that which human beings have when they hope to succeed in a bad enterprise. Otherwise the poem could not have been written. Suppose the fallen Angels to have had a working notion of the Deity as superhuman as their reputed appearance and physical greatness: then the events of the *Paradise Lost* might have happened nevertheless, but the chain of volitions would not have been the same, and it would have been impossible for any human poet to realize the narrative.

These remarks are necessary to prepare us for conceiving the Satan of Milton. Except, as we have said, for an occasional feeling during a perusal of the poem that the style of thinking and speculating about the

---

issue of their enterprise is too meagre and human for a race of beings physically so superhuman, one's astonishment at the consistency of the poet's conceptions is unmitigated throughout. Such keeping is there between one conception and another, such a distinct material grasp had the poet of his whole subject, so little is there of the mystic or the hazy in his descriptions from beginning to end, that it would be quite possible to prefix to the *Paradise Lost* an illustrative diagram exhibiting the universal space in which Milton conceived his beings moving to and fro, divided, as he conceived it, at first into two or three, and afterwards into four tropics or regions. Then his narrative is so clear that a brief prose version of it would be a history of Satan in the interval between his own fall and the fall of Man.

It is to be noted that Milton as a poet proceeds on the Homeric method, and not on the Shakespearian, devoting the whole strength of his genius to the object, not of being discursive and original, not of making profound remarks on everything as he goes along, but of carrying on a sublime and stately narrative. We should hardly be led to assert, however, that the difference between the epic and the drama lies in this, that the latter may be discursive and reflective while the former cannot. We can conceive an epic written after the Shakespearian method; that is,

one which, while strictly sustaining a narrative, should be profoundly expository in its spirit. Certain it is, however, that Milton wrote after the Homeric method, and did not exert himself chiefly in strewing his text with luminous propositions. One consequence of this is that the way to obtain an idea of Milton's Satan is not to lay hold of specific sayings that fall from his mouth, but to go through his history. Goethe's Mephistopheles, we shall find, on the other hand, reveals himself in the characteristic propositions which he utters. Satan is to be studied by following his progress ; Mephistopheles by attending to his remarks.

In the history of Milton's Satan it is important to begin at the time of his being an Archangel. Before the creation of our World, there existed, according to Milton, a grand race of beings altogether different from what we are. Those beings were Spirits. They did not lead a planetary existence ; they tenanted space in some strange, and, to us, inconceivable way. Or, rather, they did not tenant all space, but only that upper and illuminated part of infinity called Heaven. For Heaven, in Milton, is not to be considered as a locality, but as a region stretching infinitely out on all sides—an immense extent of continent and kingdom. The infinite darkness, howling and blustering underneath Heaven, was Chaos or Night. What was the exact mode of being of the Spirits who lived.

---

in dispersion through Heaven is unknown to us ; but it was social. Moreover, there subsisted between the multitudinous far-extending population of Spirits and the Almighty Creator a relation closer, or at least more sensible and immediate, than that which exists between human beings and Him. The best way of expressing this relation in human language is by the idea of physical nearness. They were God's Angels. Pursuing, each individual among them, a life of his own, agreeable to his wishes and his character, yet they all recognised themselves as the Almighty's ministering spirits. At times they were summoned, from following their different occupations in all the ends of Heaven, to assemble near the Divine presence. Among these Angels there were degrees and differences. Some were, in their very essence and constitution, grander and more sublime intelligences than the rest ; others, in the course of their long existence, had become noted for their zeal and assiduity. Thus, although really a race of beings living on their own account as men do, they constituted a hierarchy, and were called Angels.

Among all the vast angelic population three or four individuals stood pre-eminent and unapproachable. These were the Archangels. Satan was one of these : if not the highest Archangel in Heaven, he was one of the four highest. After God, he could feel conscious of being the greatest being in the Universe. But,

---

although the relation between the Deity and the angelic population was so close that we can only express it by having recourse to the conception of physical nearness, yet even to the Angels the Deity was so shrouded in clouds and mystery that the highest Archangel might proceed on a wrong notion of his character, and, just as human beings do, might believe the Divine omnipotence as a theological proposition, and yet, in going about his enterprises, might not carry a working consciousness of it along with him. There is something in the exercise of power, in the mere feeling of existence, in the stretching out of a limb, in the resisting of an obstacle, in being active in any way, which generates a conviction that our powers are self-contained, hostile to the recollection of inferiority or accountability. A messenger, employed in his master's business, becomes, in the very act of serving him, forgetful of him. As the feeling of enjoyment in action grows strong, the feeling of a dependent state of being, the feeling of being a messenger, grows weak. Repose and physical weakness are favourable to the recognition of a derived existence : hence the beauty of the feebleness of old age preceding the approach of death. The feebleness of the body weakens the self-sufficient feeling, and disposes to piety. The young man, rejoicing in his strength, cannot believe that his breath is in his nostrils. In some such way the Archangel fell. Rejoicing in

his strength, walking colossal through Heaven, gigantic in his conceptions, incessant in his working, ever scheming, ever imagining new enterprises, Satan was in his very nature the most active of God's Archangels. He was ever doing some great thing, and ever thirsting for some greater thing to do. And, alas ! his very wisdom became his folly. His notion of the Deity was higher and grander than that of any other Angel: but, then, he was not a contemplative spirit ; and his feeling of derived existence grew weak in the glow and excitement of constant occupation. As the feeling of enjoyment in action grew strong, the feeling of being an Angel grew weak. Thus the mere duration of his existence had undermined his strength and prepared him for sin. Although the greatest Angel in Heaven—nay, just because he was such—he was the readiest to fall.

At last an occasion came. When the intimation was made by the Almighty in the Congregation of the Angels that he had anointed his only-begotten Son King on the holy hill of Zion, the Archangel frowned and became a rebel: not because he had weighed the enterprise to which he was committing himself, but because he was hurried on by the impetus of an overwrought nature. Even had he weighed the enterprise, and found it wanting, he would have been a rebel nevertheless ; he would have rushed into ruin on the wheels of his old impulses. He could not have said to

himself "It is useless to rebel, and I will not," and, if he could, what a hypocrite to have remained in Heaven! His revolt was the natural issue of the thoughts to which he had accustomed himself; and his crime lay in having acquired a rebellious constitution, in having pursued action too much, and spurned worship and contemplation. Herein lay the difference between him and the other Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael.

Satan in his revolt carried a third part of the Angels with him. He had accustomed many of the Angels to his mode of thinking. One of the ways in which he gratified his desire for activity had been that of exerting a moral and intellectual influence over the inferior Angels. A few of these he had liked to associate with, discoursing with them, and observing how they imbibed his ideas. His chief associate, almost his bosom-companion, had been Beelzebub, a princely Angel. Moloch, Belial, and Mammon, had likewise been admitted to his confidence. These five had constituted a kind of clique in Heaven, giving the word to a whole multitude of inferior Angels, all of them resembling their leader in being fonder of action than of contemplation. Thus, in addition to the mere hankering after action, there had grown up in Satan's mind a love of power. This feeling that it was a glorious thing to be a leader seems to have had much to do with his voluntary sacrifice of happiness. We may conceive it to have been

voluntary. Foreseeing never so much misery would not have prevented such a spirit from rebelling. Having a third of the Angels away with him in some dark, howling region, where he might rule over them alone, would have seemed, even if he had foreseen it, infinitely preferable to the puny sovereignty of an Archangel in that world of gold and emerald : "better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." Thus we conceive him to have faced the anticipation of the future. It required little persuasion to gain over the kindred spirit of Beelzebub. These two appear to have conceived the enterprise from the beginning in a different light from that in which they represented it to their followers. Happiness with the inferior Spirits was a more important consideration than with such Spirits as Satan and Beelzebub ; and to have hinted the possibility of losing happiness in the enterprise would have been to terrify them away. Satan and Beelzebub were losing happiness to gain something which they thought better ; to the inferior Angels nothing could be mentioned that would appear better. Again, the inferior Angels, judging from narrower premises, might indulge in enthusiastic expectations which the greater knowledge of the leaders would prevent them from entertaining. At all events, the effect of the intercourse with the Angels was that a third of their number joined the standard of Satan. Then began the wars in Heaven, related in the poem.

It may be remarked that the carrying on those wars by Satan with the hope of victory is not inconsistent with what has been said as to the possibility of his not having proceeded on a false calculation. We are apt to imagine those wars as wars between the rebel Angels and the armies of God. Now this is true; but it is scarcely the proper idea in the circumstances. How could Satan have hoped for victory in that case? You can only suppose that he did so by lessening his intellect, by making him a mere blundering Fury, and not a keen, far-seeing Intelligence. But in warring with Michael and his followers he was, until the contrary should be proved, warring merely against his fellow-beings of the same Heaven, whose strength he knew and feared not. The idea of physical nearness between the Almighty and the Angels confuses us here. Satan had heard the threat which had accompanied the proclamation of the Messiah's sovereignty; but it may have been problematical in his mind whether the way in which God would fulfil the threat would be to make Michael conquer him. So he made war against Michael and his Angels. At last, when all Heaven was in confusion, the Divine omnipotence interfered. On the third day the Messiah rode forth in his strength, to end the wars and expel the rebel host from Heaven. They fled, driven before his thunder. The crystal wall of Heaven opened wide, and the two lips, rolling inward,

disclosed a spacious gap yawning into the wasteful Deep. The reeling Angels saw down, and hung back affighted ; but the terror of the Lord was behind them : headlong they threw themselves from the verge of Heaven into the fathomless abyss, eternal wrath burning after them down through the blackness like a hissing fiery funnel.

And now the Almighty determined to create a new kind of World, and to people it with a race of beings different from that already existing, inferior in the meantime to the Angels, but with the power of working themselves up into the Angelic mode of being. The Messiah, girt with omnipotence, rode out on this creating errand. Heaven opened her everlasting gates, moving on their golden hinges, and the King of Glory, uplifted on the wings of Cherubim, rode on and on into Chaos. At last he stayed his fervid wheels and took the golden compasses in his hand. Centring one point where he stood, he turned the other silently and slowly round through the profound obscurity. Thus were the limits of *our* Universe marked out—that azure region in which the stars were to shine, and the planets were to wheel. On the huge fragment of Chaos thus marked out the Creating Spirit brooded, and the light gushed down. In six days the work of creation was completed. In the centre of the new Universe hung a silvery star. That was the Earth. Thereon, in a paradise of trees

and flowers, walked Adam and Eve, the last and the fairest of all God's creatures.

Meanwhile the rebel host lay rolling in the fiery gulf underneath Chaos. The bottom of Chaos was Hell. Above it was Chaos proper, a thick, black, sweltering confusion. Above it again was the new experimental World, cut out of it like a mine, and brilliant with stars and galaxies. And high over all, behind the stars and galaxies, was Heaven itself. Satan and his crew lay rolling in Hell, the fiery element underneath Chaos. Chaos lay between them and the new World. Satan was the first to awake out of stupor and realize the whole state of the case—what had occurred, what was to be their future condition of being, and what remained to be attempted. In the first dialogue between him and Beelzebub we see that, even thus early, he had ascertained what his function was to be for the future, and decided in what precise mode of being he could make his existence most pungent and perceptible.

“ Of this be sure,  
To do aught good never will be our task,  
But ever to do evil our sole delight,  
As being the contrary to His high will  
Whom we resist.”

Here the ruined Archangel first strikes out the idea of existing for ever after as the Devil. It is important to observe that his becoming a Devil was not the mere

inevitable consequence of his being a ruined Archangel. Beelzebub, for instance, could see in the future nothing but a prospect of continued suffering, until Satan communicated to him his conception of a way of enjoying action in the midst of suffering. Again, some of the Angels appear to have been ruminating the possibility of retrieving their former condition by patient enduring. The gigantic scheme of becoming a Devil was Satan's. At first it existed in his mind only as a vague perception that the way in which he would be most likely to get the full worth of his existence was to employ himself thenceforward in doing evil. The idea afterwards became more definite. After glancing round their new domain, Beelzebub and he aroused their abject followers. In the speech which Satan addresses to them after they had all mustered in order we find him hint an opening into a new career, as if the idea had just occurred to him :—

“ Space may produce new worlds; whereof so rife  
There went a fame in Heaven that He ere long  
Intended to create, and therein plant  
A generation whom His choice regard  
Should favour equal to the sons of Heaven :  
Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps  
Our first eruption.”

Here is an advance in definiteness upon the first proposal—that, namely, of determining to spend the rest

of existence in doing evil. Casting about in his mind for some specific opening, Satan had recollected the talk they used to have in Heaven about the new World that was to be cut out of Chaos, and the new race of beings that was to be created to inhabit it; and it instantly struck his scheming fancy that *this* would be the weak point of the Universe. If he could but insert the wedge here! He did not, however, announce the scheme fully at the moment, but went on thinking. In the council of gods which was summoned some advised one thing, some another. Moloch was for open war; Belial had great faith in the force of circumstances; and Mainmon was for organizing their new kingdom so as to make it as comfortable as possible. No one, however, could say the exact thing that was wanted. At last Beelzebub, prompted by Satan, rose and detailed the project of their great leader :—

“ There is a place  
(If ancient and prophetic faine in Heaven  
Err not), another world, the happy seat  
Of some new race called Man, about this time  
To be created, like to us, though less  
In power and excellence, but favoured more  
Of Him who rules above. So was His will  
Pronounced among the gods, and by an oath  
That shook Heaven's whole circumference confirmed.  
Thither let us bend all our thoughts, and learn  
What creatures there inhabit, of what mould

Or substance, how endued, and what their power  
And where their weakness : how attempted best ;  
By force or subtlety."

This was Satan's scheme. The more he had thought on it the more did it recommend itself to him. It was more feasible than any other. It held out an indefinite prospect of action. Success in it would be the addition of another fragment of the Universe to Satan's kingdom, mingling and confounding the new World with Hell, and dragging down the new race of beings to share the perdition of the old. The scheme was universally applauded by the Angels ; who seem to have differed from their leaders in this, that they were sanguine of being able to better their condition, whereas their leaders sought only the gratification of their desire of action.

The question next was, Who would venture out of Hell to explore the way to the new World ? Satan volunteered the perilous excursion. Immediately, putting on his swiftest wings, he directs his solitary flight towards Hell-gate, where sat Sin and Death. When, at length, the gate was opened to give him exit, it was like a huge furnace-mouth, vomiting forth smoke and flames into the womb of Chaos. Issuing thence, Satan spread his sail-broad wings for flight, and began his toilsome way upward, half on foot, half on wing, swimming, sinking, wading, climbing, flying, through

the thick and turbid element. At last he emerged out of Chaos into the glimmer surrounding the new Universe. Winging at leisure now through the balmier ether, and still ascending, he could discern at last the whole empyrean Heaven, his former home, with its opal towers and sapphire battlements, and, depending thence by a golden chain, our little World or Universe, like a star of smallest magnitude on the full moon's edge. At the point of suspension of this World from Heaven was an opening, and by that opening Satan entered.

When Satan thus arrived in the new Creation the whole phenomenon was strange to him, and he had no idea what kind of a being Man was. He asked Uriel, whom he found on the sun fulfilling some Divine errand, in which of all the shining orbs round him Man had fixed his seat, or whether he had a fixed seat at all, and was not at liberty to shift his residence, and dwell now in one star, now in another. Uriel, deceived by the appearance which Satan had assumed, pointed out the way to Paradise.

Alighting on the surface of the Earth, Satan walks about immersed in thought. Heaven's gate was in view. Overhead and round him were the quiet hills and the green fields. Oh, what an errand he had come upon! His thoughts were sad and noble. Fallen as he was, all the Archangel stirred within him. Oh, had he not been made so high, should he ever have fallen

so low? Is there no hope even now, no room for repentance? Such were his first thoughts. But he roused himself and shook them off. "The past is gone and away; it is to the future that I must look. Perish the days of my Archangelship! perish the name of Archangel! Such is my name no longer. My future, if less happy, shall be more glorious. Ah, and this is the World I have singled out for my experiment! Formerly, in the days of my Archangelship, I ranged at will through infinity, doing one thing here and another there. Now I must contract the sphere of my activity, and labour nowhere but here. But it is better to apply myself to the task of thoroughly impregnating one point of space with my presence than henceforth to beat my wings vaguely all through infinitude. Ah, but may not my nature suffer by the change? In thus selecting a specific aim, in thus concerning myself exclusively with one point of space, and forswearing all interest in the innumerable glorious things that may be happening out of it, shall I not run the risk of degenerating into a smaller and meaner being? In the course of ages of dealing with the puny offspring of these new beings, may I not dwindle into a mere pungent, pettifogging Spirit? What would Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael say, were they to see their old co-mate changed into such a being? But be it so. If I cannot cope with the Almighty on the grand scale of

infinity, I shall at least make my existence felt by opposing His plans respecting this new race of beings. Besides, by beginning with this, may I not worm my way to a more effective position even in infinity? At all events, I shall have a scheme on hand, and be incessantly occupied. And, as time makes the occupation more congenial, if I do become less magnanimous, I shall, at the same time, become happier. And, whether my fears on this point are visionary or not, it will, at least, be a noble thing to be able to say that I have caused a whirlpool that shall suck down generation after generation of these new beings, before their Maker's eyes, into the same wretched condition of being to which He has doomed us. It will be something so to vitiate the Universe that, let Him create, create on, as He chooses, it will be like pouring water into a broken vessel."

In the very course of this train of thinking Satan begins to degenerate into a meaner being. He is on the very threshold of that career in which he will cease for ever to be the Archangel and become irrevocably the Devil. The very manner in which he tempts the first pair is devil-like. It is in the shape of a cormorant on a tree that he sits watching his victims. He sat at the ear of Eve "squat like a toad." It was in the shape of a serpent that he tempted her. And, when the evil was done, he slunk away through the brush wood. In the very act of ruining Man he committed

himself to a life of ignominious activity: he was to go on his belly and eat dust all his days.

Such is the story of Milton's Satan. It will be easy to express more precisely the idea which we have acquired of him when we come to contrast him with Goethe's Mephistopheles. Meanwhile, we shall be much assisted in our efforts to conceive Goethe's Mephistopheles by keeping in mind what we have been saying about Milton's Satan.

We do not think it possible to sum up in a single expression all that Goethe meant to signify by his Mephistopheles. For one thing, it is questionable whether Goethe kept strictly working out one specific meaning and making it clearer all through Mephistopheles's gambols and devilries, or whether, having once for all allegorized the Spirit of Evil into a living personage, he did not treat him just as he would have treated any other of his characters, making him always consistent, always diabolic, but not intent upon making his actions run parallel to any under-current of exposition. It may be best, therefore, to take Mephistopheles as a character in a drama which we wish to study. On the whole, perhaps, we shall be on the right track if, in the first place, we establish a relation between Satan and Mephistopheles by adopting the notion which we have imagined Satan himself to have

entertained when engaged in scheming out his future life, *i.e.* if we suppose Mephistopheles to be what Satan has become after six thousand years. Milton's Satan, then, is the ruined Archangel deciding his future function, and forswearing all interest in other regions of the universe, in order that he may more thoroughly possess and impregnate this. Goethe's Mephistopheles is this same being after the toils and vicissitudes of six thousand years in his new vocation : smaller, meaner, ignobler, but a million times sharper and cleverer. By way of corroboration of this view, we may refer, in passing, to the Satan of the *Paradise Regained*; who, though still a sublime and Miltonic being, dealing in high thoughts and high argument, yet seems to betray, in his demeanour, the effects of four thousand years spent in a new walk. Is there not something Mephistopheles-like, for instance, in the description of the Fiend's appearance when he approached Christ to begin his temptation ? Christ was walking alone and thoughtful one evening in the thick of the forest where he had lived fasting forty days, when he heard the dry twigs behind him snapping beneath approaching footsteps. He turned round, and

“ An aged man in rural weeds,  
Following as seemed the quest of some stray ewe,  
Or withered sticks to gather, which might serve  
Against a winter's day when winds blow keen ”

---

To warm him, wet returned from field at eve,  
He saw approach ; who first with curious eye  
Perused him, then with words thus uttered spake."

Observe how all the particulars of this description are drawn out of the very thick of the civilization of the past four thousand years, and how the whole effect of the picture is to suggest a Mephistopheles man, whom it would be disagreeable to meet alone. Indeed, if one had space, one could make more use of the *Paradise Regained* as exhibiting the transition of Satan into Mephistopheles. But we must pass at once to Goethe.

Viewing Mephistopheles in the proposed light (of course it is not pretended that Goethe himself had any such idea about his Mephistopheles), we obtain a good deal of insight from the "Prologue in Heaven." For here we have Mephistopheles out of his element, and contrasted with his old co-equals. The scene is Miltonic. The Heavenly Hosts are assembled round the throne, and the three Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, come forward to praise the Lord. The theme of their song is Creation—not, as it would have been in Milton, as an event about to take place, and which would vary the monotony of the universe, but as a thing existing and grandly going on. It is to be noted too that, while Milton appeals chiefly to the sight, and is clear and coherent in his imagery, Goethe produces a similar

---

effect in his own manner by appealing to sight and hearing simultaneously, making sounds and metaphors dance and whirl through each other, as in a wild, indistinct, but overpowering dream. Raphael describes the Sun rolling on in thunder through the heavens, singing in chorus with the kindred stars. Gabriel describes the Earth revolving on her axis, one hemisphere glittering in the light, the other dipped in shadow. Michael in continuation sings of the enshowering atmosphere and the storms that rage in it, darting forth tongues of lightning, and howling in gusts over land and sea. And then the three burst forth in symphony, exulting in their nature as beings deriving strength from serene contemplation, and proclaiming all God's works to be as bright and glorious as on the day they were created. Suddenly, while Heaven is still thrilling to the grand undulation, another voice breaks in :

“ Da du, O Herr, dich einmal wieder nahst,  
    Und fragst wie alles sich bei uns befindet,  
Und du mich sonst gewöhnlich gerne sahst,  
    So siehst du mich auch unter dem Gesinde.”

Ugh ! what a discord ! The tone, the voice, the words, the very metre, so horribly out of tune with what had gone before ! Mephistopheles is the speaker. He has been standing behind, looking about him and listening

---

with a sarcastic air to the song of the Archangels ; and, when they have done, he thinks it his turn to speak, and immediately begins. (We give the passage in translation.)

" Since thou, O Lord, approachest us once more,  
And askest how affairs with us are going,  
And commonly hast seen me here before,  
To this my presence 'mid the rest is owing.  
Excuse my plainness ; I'm no hand at chaffing ;  
I *can't* talk fine, though all around should scorn ;  
*My* pathos certainly would set thee laughing,  
Hadst thou not laughter long ago forbore.  
Of suns and worlds deuce one word can *I* gabble ;  
I only know how men grow miserable.  
The little god of Earth is still the same old clay,  
And is as odd this hour as on Creation's day.  
Better somewhat his situation  
Hadst thou not given him that same light of in-  
spiration :  
Reason he calls 't, and uses 't so that he  
Grows but more beastly than the beasts to be ;  
He seems to me, begging your Grace's pardon,  
Like one of those long-legged things in a garden  
That fly about and hop and spring,  
And in the grass the same old chirrup sing.  
Would I could say that here the story closes !  
But in each filthy mess they thrust their noses."

And so shameless, and at the same time so voluble, is he that he would go on longer in the same strain did not the Lord interrupt him.

Now this speech both announces and exhibits Mephistopheles's nature. Without even knowing the language, one could hardly hear the original read as Mephistopheles's without seeing in it shamelessness, impudence, volubility, cleverness, a sneering, sarcastic disposition, want of heart, want of sentiment, want of earnestness, want of purpose, complete, confirmed, irrecoverable devilishness. And, besides, Mephistopheles candidly describes himself in it. When, in sly and sarcastic allusion to the song of the Archangels, he tells that *he* has not the gift of talking fine, he announces in effect that he is not going to be Miltonic. *He* is not going to speak of suns and universes, he says. Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, are at home in that sort of thing; but *he* is not. Leaving them, therefore, to tell how the universe is flourishing on the grand scale, and how the suns and the planets are going on as beautifully as ever, he will just say a word or two as to how human nature is getting on down yonder; and, to be sure, if comparison be the order of the day, the little godkin, Man, is quite as odd as on the day he was made. And at once, with astounding impudence, he launches into a train of remark the purport of which is that everything down below is at sixes and sevens, and that in his opinion human nature has turned out a failure. And, heedless of the disgust of his audience, he would go on talking for ever, were he not interrupted.

And is this the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*? Is this the Archangel ruined? Is this the being who warred against the Almighty, who lay floating many a rood, who shot upwards like a pyramid of fire, who navigated space wherever he chose, speeding on his errands from star to star, and who finally conceived the gigantic scheme of assaulting the universe where it was weakest, and impregnating the new creation with the venom of his spirit? Yes, it is he; but oh, how changed! For six thousand years he has been pursuing the walk he struck out at the beginning, plying his self-selected function, dabbling devilishly in human nature, and abjuring all interest in the grander physics; and the consequence is, as he himself anticipated, that his nature, once great and magnificent, has become small, virulent, and shrunken,

“Subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”

As if he had been journeying through a wilderness of scorching sand, all that was left of the Archangel has long since evaporated. He is now a dry, shrivelled up, scoffing spirit. When, at the moment of scheming out his future existence and determining to become a Devil, he anticipated the ruin of his nature, he could not help thinking with what a strange feeling he should then appear before his old co-equals, Raphael, Gabriel,

and Michael. But now he stands before them disgustingly unabashed, almost ostentatious of not being any longer an Archangel. Even in the days of his glory he was different from them. They luxuriated in contemplation; he in the feeling of innate all-sufficient vigour. And lo, now! They are unchanged, the servants of the Lord, revering the day's gentle going. He, the scheming, enthusiastic Archangel, has been soured and civilized into the clever cold-hearted Mephistopheles.

Mephistopheles is the Spirit of Evil in modern society. Goethe's *Faust* is an illustration of this spirit's working in the history of an individual. The case selected is a noble one. Faust, a man of grand and restless nature, is aspiring after universality of feeling. Utterly dissatisfied and disgusted with all human method and all human acquisition, nay, fretting at the constitution of human nature itself, he longs to spill out his soul, so that, mingling with the winds, it may become a part of the ever-thrilling spirit of the universe and know the essence of everything. He has been contemplating suicide. To this great nature struggling with itself Mephistopheles is linked. It is to be noted that throughout the whole drama there is no evidence that it was an object of very earnest solicitude with Mephistopheles to gain possession of the soul of Faust. Of course, he desired this, and had

it in view. Thus, he exacted a bond from Faust; and we find him also now and then chuckling when alone in anticipation of Faust's ultimate ruin. But on the whole he is constant to no earnest plan for effecting it. In fact, he is constant to no single purpose whatever. The desire of doing devilry is his motive all through. Going about with Faust was but being in the way of business and having a companion at the same time. He studies his own gratification, not Faust's, in all that he does. Faust never gets what he had a right to expect from him. He is dragged hither and thither through scenes he has no anxiety to be in, merely that Mephistopheles may enjoy some new and *piquant* piece of devilry. The moment he and Faust enter any place, he quits Faust's side and mixes with the persons present, to do some mischief or other; and, when it is done, he comes back to Faust, who has been standing, with his arms folded, gloomily looking on, and asks him if he could desire any better amusement than this. Now this is not the conduct of a devil intent upon nothing so much as gaining possession of the soul of his victim. A Miltonic devil would have pressed on to the mark more. He would have been more self-denying, and would have kept his victim in better humour. But Mephistopheles is a devil to the very core. He is a devil in his conduct to Faust. What he studies is not to

gratify Faust, but to find plenty of congenial occupation for himself, to perpetrate as great a quantity of evil as possible in as short a time as possible. It seems capable of being inferred from this peculiarity in the character of Mephistopheles that Goethe had in his mind all through the poem a certain under-current of allegoric meaning. One sees that Mephistopheles, though acting as a dramatic personage, represents an abstract something or other.

The character of Mephistopheles is brought out all through the drama. In the first and second parts we have Faust and him brought into a great variety of situations and into contact with a great variety of individuals; and in watching how Mephistopheles conducts himself in these we obtain more and more insight into his devilish nature. He manifests himself in two ways—by his style of speaking, and by his style of acting. That is to say, Mephistopheles, in the first place, has a habit of making observations upon all subjects, and throwing out all kinds of general propositions in the course of his conversation, and by attending to the spirit of these one can perceive very distinctly his mode of looking at things; and, in the second place, he acts a part in the drama, and this part is, of course, characteristic.

The distinguishing feature in Mephistopheles's conversation is the amazing intimacy which it displays

with all the conceivable ways in which crime can be perpetrated. There is positively not a wrong thing that people are in the habit of doing that he does not seem to be aware of. He is profound in his acquaintance with iniquity. If there is a joint loose anywhere in society, he knows of it; if the affairs of the State are going into confusion because of some blockhead's mismanagement, he knows of it. He is versed in all the forms of professional quackery. He knows how pedants hoodwink people, how priests act the hypocrite, how physicians act the rake, how lawyers peculate. In all sorts of police information he is a perfect Fouché. He has gone deep enough into one fell subject to be able to write a book like Duchatelet's. And not only has he accumulated a mass of observations, but he has generalized those observations, and marked evil in its grand educational sources. If the human mind is going out into a hopeless track of speculation, he has observed and knows it. If the universities are frittering away the intellect of the youth of a country in useless and barren studies, he knows it. If atheistic politicians are vehemently defending the religious institutions of a country, he has marked the prognostication. Whatever promises to inflict misery, to lead people astray, to break up beneficial alliances, to make men flounder on in error, to cause them to die blaspheming at the last, he is

thoroughly cognisant of it all. He could draw up a catalogue of social vices. He could point out the specific existing grievances to which the disorganization of a people is owing, and lay his finger on the exact parent evils which the philanthropist ought to exert himself in exposing and making away with. But here lies the diabolical peculiarity of his knowledge. It is not in the spirit of a philanthropist that he has accumulated his information ; it is in the spirit of a devil. It is not with the benevolent motive of a Duchatelet that he has descended into the lurking-places of iniquity ; it is because he delights in knowing the whole extent of human misery. The doing of evil being his function, it is but natural that he should have a taste for even the minutest details of his own profession. Nay more, as the Spirit of all evil, who had been working from the beginning, how could he fail to be acquainted with all the existing varieties of criminal occupation ? It is but as if he kept a diary. Now, in this combination of the knowledge of evil with the desire of producing it lies the very essence of his character. The combination is horrible, unnatural, unhuman. Generally the motive to investigate deeply into what is wrong is the desire to rectify it ; and it is rarely that profligates possess very valuable information. But in every one of Mephistopheles's speeches there is some profound glimpse into the rottenness of society,

some masterly specification of an evil that ought to be rooted out; and yet there "is not one of those speeches in which the language is not flippant and sarcastic, not one in which the tone is sorrowful or philanthropic. Everything is going wrong in the world; twaddle and quackery everywhere abounding; nothing to be seen under the sun but hypocritical priests, sharky attorneys, unfaithful wives, children crying for bread to eat, men and women cheating, robbing, murdering each other: hurrah! This is exactly a burst of Mephistophelic feeling. In fact it is an intellectual defect in Mephistopheles that his having such an eye for evil and his taking such an interest in it prevent him from allowing anything for good in his calculations. To Mephistopheles the world seems going to perdition as fast as it can, while in the same universal confusion beings like the Archangels recognise the good struggling with the evil.

Respecting the part which Mephistopheles performs in the drama we have already said something. Going about the world, linked to Faust, is to him only a racy way of acting the devil. Having as his companion a man so flighty in his notions did but increase the flavour of whatever he engaged in. All through he is laughing in secret at Faust, and deriving a keen enjoyment from his transcendental style of thinking. Faust's noble qualities are all Greek and Gaelic to his

cold and devilish nature. He has a contempt for all strong feeling, all sentiment, all evangelism. He enjoys the Miltonic vastly. Thus in the "Prologue in Heaven" he quizzes the Archangels about the grandiloquence of their song. Not that he does not understand that sort of thing intellectually, but that it is not in his nature to sympathize with anything like sentiment. Hence, when he assumes the sentimental himself and mimicks any lofty strain, although he does it full justice in as far as giving the whole intellectual extent of meaning is concerned, yet he always does so in words so inappropriate emotionally that the effect is a parody. He must have found amusement enough in Faust's company to have reconciled him in some measure to losing him finally.

But to go on. Mephistopheles acts the devil all through. In the first place he acts the devil to Faust himself, for he is continually taking his own way and starting difficulties whenever Faust proposes anything. Then again in his conduct towards the other principal personages of the drama it is the same. In the murder of poor Margaret, her mother, her child, and her brother, we have as fiendish a series of acts as devil could be supposed capable of perpetrating. And, lastly, in the mere filling up and side play, it is the same. He is constantly doing unnecessary mischief. If he enters Auerbach's wine-cellar and introduces

himself to the four drinking companions, it is to set the poor brutes fighting and make them cut off each other's noses. If he spends a few minutes in talk with Martha, it is to make the silly old woman expose her foibles. The Second Part of Faust is devilry all through, a tissue of bewilderments and devilries. And while doing all this Mephistopheles is still the same cold, self-possessed, sarcastic being. If he exhibits any emotion at all, it is a kind of devilish anger. Perhaps, too, once or twice we recognise something like terror or flurry. But on the whole he is a spirit bereft of feeling. What could indicate the heart of a devil more than his words to Faust in the harrowing prison scene ?

“Komm, komm, ich lasse dich mit ihr im Stich.”

And now for a word or two describing Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles by each other :—Satan is a colossal figure ; Mephistopheles an elaborated portrait. Satan is a fallen Archangel scheming his future existence ; Mephistopheles is the modern Spirit of Evil. Mephistopheles has a distinctly marked physiognomy ; Satan has not. Satan has a sympathetic knowledge of good ; Mephistopheles knows good only as a phenomenon. Much of what Satan says might be spoken by Raphael ; a devilish spirit runs through all that

Mephistopheles says. Satan's bad actions are preceded by noble reasonings; Mephistopheles does not reason. Satan's bad actions are followed by compunctionous visitings; Mephistopheles never repents. Satan is often "inly racked;" Mephistopheles can feel nothing more noble than disappointment. Satan conducts an enterprise; Mephistopheles enjoys an occupation. Satan has strength of purpose; Mephistopheles is volatile. Satan feels anxiety; Mephistopheles lets things happen. Satan's greatness lies in the vastness of his motives; Mephistopheles's in his intimate acquaintance with everything. Satan has a few sublime conceptions; Mephistopheles has accumulated a mass of observations. Satan declaims; Mephistopheles puts in remarks. Satan is conversant with the moral aspects of things and uses adjectives; Mephistopheles has a preference for nouns, and uses adjectives only to convey significations which he *knows* to exist. Satan may end in being a devil; Mephistopheles is a devil irrecoverably.

Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles are literary performances; and, for what they prove, neither Milton nor Goethe need have believed in a Devil at all. Luther's Devil, on the other hand, was a being recognised by him as actually existing—as existing, one might say, with a vengeance. The strong conviction which Luther had on this point is a feature in his

character. The narrative of his life abounds in anecdotes showing that the Devil with him was no chimera, no mere orthodoxy, no fiction. In every page of his writings we have the word *Teufel*, *Teufel*, repeated again and again. Occasionally there occurs an express dissertation upon the nature and functions of the Evil Spirit; and one of the longest chapters in his *Table Talk* is that entitled "The Devil and his Works"—indicating that his conversation with his friends often turned on the subject of Satanic agency. *Teufel* was actually the strongest signification he had ; and, whenever he was excited to his highest emotional pitch, it came in to assist his utterance at the climax, and give him a correspondingly powerful expression. "This thing I will do," it was common for him to say, "in spite of all who may oppose me, be it duke, emperor, priest, bishop, cardinal, pope, or Devil." Man's heart, he says, is a "Stock, Stein, Eisen, Teufel, hart Herz," ("a stock, stone, iron, Devil, hard heart"). And it was not a mere vague conception he had of this being, such as theology might oblige. On the contrary, he had observed him as a man would his personal enemy, and in so doing had formed a great many conclusions respecting his powers and his character. In general, Luther's Devil may be defined as a personification, in the spirit of Scripture, of the resisting medium which Luther had to toil his way through—

spiritual fears, passionate uprisings, fainting resolutions within himself; error, weakness, envy, in those around him; and, without, a whole world howling for his destruction. It is in effect as if Luther had said, "Scripture reveals to me the existence of a great accursed Being, whose function it is to produce evil. It is for me to ascertain the character of this Being, whom I, of all men, have to deal with. And how am I to do so except by observing him working? God knows I have not far to go in search of his manifestations." And thus Luther went on filling up the Scriptural proposition with his daily experience. He was constantly gaining a clearer conception of his great personal antagonist, constantly stumbling upon some more concealed trait in the Spirit's character. The Being himself was invisible; but men were walking in the midst of his manifestations. It was as if there were some Being whom we could not see, nor directly in the ordinary way have any intercourse with, but who every morning, before it was light, came and left at our doors some exquisite specimen of his workmanship. It would, of course, be difficult under such disadvantages to become acquainted with the character of our invisible correspondent and nightly visitant; still we could arrive at a few conclusions respecting him, and the more of his workmanship we saw the more insight we should come to have. Or again, in striving

---

to realize to himself the Scriptural proposition about the Devil, Luther, to speak in the language of the "Positive Philosophy," was but striving to ascertain the laws according to which evil happens. Only the Positive Philosophy would lay a veto on any such speculation, and pronounce it fundamentally vicious in this respect—that there are not two courses of events, separable from each other, in history, the one good and the other evil, but that evil comes of good and good of evil; so that, if we are to have a science of history at all, the most we can have is a science of the laws according to which, not evil follows evil, but events follow each other. But History to Luther was not a physical course of events. It was God acting, and the Devil opposing.

So far Luther did not differ from his age. Belief in Satanic agency was universal at that period. We have no idea now how powerful this belief was. We realize something of the truth when we read the depositions in an old book of trials for witchcraft. But it is sufficient to glance over any writings of the period to see what a real meaning was then attached to the words "Hell" and "Devil." The spirit of these words has become obsolete, chased away by the spirit of exposition. That was what M. Comte calls the Theological period, when all the phenomena of mind and matter were referred to the agency of Spirits. The going out of the belief in Satanic agency (for even those who retain it

in profession allow it no force in practice) M. Comte would attribute to the progress of the spirit of that philosophy of which he is the apostle. We do not think, however, that the mere progress of the scientific spirit—that is, the mere disposition of men to pursue one mode of thinking with respect to all classes of phenomena—could have been sufficient of itself to work such an alteration in the general mind. We are fond of accounting for it, in part at least, by the going out, in the progress of civilization, of those sensations which seem naturally fitted to nourish the belief in supernatural beings. The tendency of civilization has been to diminish our opportunities of feeling terror, of feeling strongly at all. The horrific plays a much less important part in human experience than it once did. To mention but a single instance: we are exempted now, by mechanical contrivances for locomotion, &c., from the necessity of being much in darkness or wild physical solitude. This is especially the case with those who dwell in cities, and therefore exert most conspicuously an intellectual influence. The moaning of the wind at night in winter is about their highest experience of the kind; and is it not a corroboration of the view now suggested that the belief in the supernatural is always strongest at the moment of this experience? Scenes and situations our ancestors were in every day are strange to us. We have not now to

---

travel through forests at the dead of night, nor to pass a lonely spot on a moor where a murderer's body is swinging from a gibbet. Tam o' Shanter, even before he came to Alloway Kirk, saw more than many of us see in a life-time.

"By this time he was 'cross the ford  
Whaur in the snaw the chapman smoored,  
And past the barks and muckle stane  
Whaur drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane,  
And through the whins and by the cairn  
Whaur hunters fand the murdered bairn,  
And near the thorn aboon the well  
Whaur Mungo's mither hanged hersel'."

This effect of civilization in reducing all our sensations to those of comfort is a somewhat alarming circumstance in the point of view we are now taking. It is necessary, for many a reason, to resist the universal application of the "Positive Philosophy," even if we adopt and adore it as an instrument of explication. The "Positive Philosophy" commands us to forbear all speculation into the inexplicable. For the sake of many things this order must be disregarded. Speculation into the metaphysical is the invariable accompaniment of strong feeling; and the moral nature of man would starve upon such chopped straw as the mere intellectual relations of similitude and succession. Nor does it meet the demands of the case to say that the

"Positive Philosophy" would be always far in arrear of the known phenomena, and that here would be mystery enough. No! the "Positive Philosophy" would require to strike a chasm in itself under the title of the Liberty of Hypothesis. We do not mean the liberty of hypothesis merely as a means of anticipating theory, but for spiritual and imaginative purposes. It is in this light that one would welcome Animal Magnetism, or any thing else whatever that would but knock a hole through the paper wall that incloses our mode of being, snub the self-conceit of our present knowledge, and give us other and more difficult phenomena to explain.

But, though Luther and his age were not at variance in the belief in Satanic agency, Luther, of course, did this as he did every thing else, gigantically. The Devil, as Luther conceived him, was not the Satan of Milton; although, had Luther set himself to realize the Miltonic narrative, his conception might not have been dissimilar. But it was as the enemy of mankind, working in human affairs, that Luther conceived the Devil. We should expect his conception therefore to tally with Goethe's in some respects, but only as a conception of Luther's would tally with one of Goethe's. Luther's conception was truer to the strict Scriptural definition than either Milton's or Goethe's. Mephistopheles being a character in a drama, and apparently fully occupied

in his part there, we cannot bring ourselves to recognise in him that virtually omnipotent being to whom all evil is owing, who is leavening the human mind everywhere as if the atmosphere round the globe were charged with the venom of his spirit. In the case of Milton's Satan we have no such difficulty, because in his case a whole planet is at stake, and there are only two individuals on it. But Luther's conception met the whole exigency of Scripture. His conception was distinctly that of a being to whose operation all the evil of all times and all places is owing, a veritable *πνευμα* diffused through the earth's atmosphere. Hence his mind had to entertain the notion of a plurality of devils; for he could conceive the Arch-Demon acting corporeally only through imps or emanations. Goethe's Mephistopheles might pass for one of these.

It would be possible farther to illustrate Luther's conception of the Evil Principle by quoting many of his specific sayings about diabolic agency. It would be found from these that his conception was that of a being to whom evil of all kinds was dear. The Devil with him was a meteorological agent. Devils, he said, are in woods, and waters, and dark poolly places, ready to hurt passers-by; there are devils also in the thick black clouds, who cause hail and thunders and lightnings, and poison the air and the fields and the pastures. "When such things happen, philosophers say they are

natural, and ascribe them to the planets, and I know not what all." The Devil he believed also to be the patron of witchcraft. The Devil, he said, had the power of deceiving the senses, so that one should swear he heard or saw something while really the whole was an illusion. The Devil also was at the bottom of dreaming and somnambulism. He was likewise the author of diseases. "I hold," said Luther, "that the Devil sendeth all heavy diseases and sicknesses upon people." Diseases are, as it were, the Devil striking people; only, in striking, he must use some natural instrument, as a murderer uses a sword. When our sins get the upper hand, and all is going wrong, then the Devil must be God's hangman, to clear away obstructions and to blast the earth with famines and pestilences. Whatsoever procures death, that is the Devil's trade. All sadness and melancholy come of the Devil. So does insanity; but the Devil has no farther power over the soul of a maniac. The Devil works in the affairs of nations. He looks always upward, taking an interest in what is high and pompous; he does not look downward, taking little interest in what is insignificant and lowly. He likes to work on the great scale, to establish an influence over the central minds which manage public affairs. The Devil is also a spiritual tempter. He is the opponent of the Divine grace in the hearts of individuals. This was the aspect of the doctrine of Satanic agency which

was most frequent in preaching; and, ~~most~~ <sup>especially</sup>, Luther's propositions on the point are very specific. He had ascertained the laws of Satanic operation upon the human spirit. The Devil, he said, knows Scripture well, and uses it in argument. He shoots fearful thoughts, which are his fiery darts, into the hearts of the godly. The Devil is acquainted even with those mysterious enjoyments, those spiritual excitements, which the Christian would suppose a being like him must be ignorant of. "What gross inexperienced fellows," Luther says, "are those Papist commentators! They are for interpreting Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' to be merely fleshly lust; because they know no other kind of tribulation than that." But, though the Devil has great power over the human mind, he is limited in some respects. He has no means, for instance, of knowing the thoughts of the faithful until they give them utterance. Again, if the Devil be once foiled in argument, he cannot tempt that soul again on the same tack. The Papacy being with Luther the grand existing form of evil, he of course recognised the Devil in *it*. If the Papacy were once overthrown, Satan would lose his stronghold. Never on earth again would he be able to pile up such another edifice. No wonder, then, that at that moment all the energies of the enraged and despairing Spirit were employed to prop up the reeling and tottering fabric. Necessarily, therefore, Luther and Satan

were personal antagonists. Satan saw that the grand struggle was with Luther. If he could but crush him by physical violence, or make him forget God, then the world would be his own again. So, often did he wrestle with Luther's spirit; often in nightly heart-agonies did he try to shake Luther's faith in Christ. But he was never victorious. "All the Duke Georges in the universe," said Luther, "are not equal to a single Devil; and I do not fear the Devil." "I should wish," he said, "to die rather by the Devil's hands than by the hands of Pope or Emperor; for then I should die, at all events, by the hands of a great and mighty Prince of the World: but, if I die through him, he shall eat such a bit of me as shall be his suffocation; he shall spew me out again; and, at the last day, I, in requital, shall devour him." When all other means were unavailing, Luther found that the Devil could not stand against humour. In his hours of spiritual agony, he tells us, when the Devil was heaping up his sins before him, so as to make him doubt whether he should be saved, and when he could not drive the Devil away by uttering sentences of Holy Writ, or by prayer, he used to address him thus: "Devil, if, as you say, Christ's blood, which was shed for my sins, be not sufficient to insure my salvation, can't you pray for me yourself, Devil?" At this the Devil invariably fled, "*quia est superbus spiritus et non potest ferre contemptum sui.*"

What Luther called "wrestling with the Devil" we at this day call "low spirits." Life must be a much more insipid thing than it was then. O what a soul that man must have had; under what a weight of feeling, that would have crushed a thousand of us, *he* must have trod the earth!

SHAKESPEARE AND GOETHE.

## SHAKESPEARE AND GOETHE.<sup>1</sup>

IF there are any two portraits which we all expect to find hung up in the rooms of those whose tastes are regulated by the highest literary culture, they are the portraits of Shakespeare and Goethe.

There are, indeed, many and various gods in our modern Pantheon of genius. It contains rough gods and smooth gods, gods of symmetry and gods of strength, gods great and terrible, gods middling and respectable, and little cupids and toy-gods. Out of this variety each master of a household will select his own Penates, the appropriate gods of his own mantelpiece. The roughest will find some to worship them, and the smallest shall not want domestic adoration. But we suppose a dilettante of the first class, one who, besides excluding from his range of choice the deities of war, and cold

<sup>1</sup> *British Quarterly Review*, November, 1852.—1. “Shakspeare and His Times.” By M. Guizot. 1852.—2. “Shakspeare’s Dramatic Art; and his Relation to Calderon and Goethe.” Translated from the German of Dr. Hermann Ulrici. 1846.—3. “Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret.” Translated from the German by John Oxenford. 2 vols. 1850.

thought, and civic action, shall further exclude from it all those even of the gods of modern literature who, whether by reason of their inferior rank, or by reason of their peculiar attributes, fail as models of universal stateliness. What we should expect to see over the mantelpiece of such a rigorous person would be the images of the English Shakespeare and the German Goethe.

On the one side, we will suppose, fixed with due gance against the luxurious crimson of the wall, would be a slab of black marble exhibiting in relief a white plaster-cast of the face of Shakespeare as modelled from the Stratford bust; on the other, in a similar setting, would be a copy, if possible, of the mask of Goethe taken at Weimar after the poet's death. This would suffice; and the considerate beholder could find no fault with such an arrangement. It is true, reasons might be assigned why a third mask should have been added—that of the Italian Dante; in which case Dante and Goethe should have occupied the sides, and Shakespeare should have been placed higher up between. But the master of the house would point out how, in that case, a fine taste would have been pained by the inevitable sense of contrast between the genial mildness of the two Teutonic faces and the severe and scornful melancholy of the poet of the Inferno. The face of the Italian poet, as being so different in kind, must either be reluctantly omitted, he would say, or transferred by itself to the

other side of the room. Unless, indeed, with a view to satisfy the claims both of degree and of kind, Shakespeare were to be placed alone over the mantelpiece, and Dante and Goethe in company on the opposite wall, where, there being but two, the contrast would be rather agreeable than otherwise! On the whole, however, and without prejudice to new arrangements in the course of future decorations, he is content that it should be as it is.

And so, reader, for the present are we. Let us enter together, then, if it seems worth while, the room of this imaginary dilettante during his absence; let us turn the key in the lock, so that he may not come in to interrupt us; and let us look for a little time at the two masks he has provided for us over the mantelpiece, receiving such reflections as they may suggest. Doubtless we have often looked at the two masks before; but that matters little.

As we gaze at the first of the two masks, what is it that we see? A face full in contour, of good oval shape, the individual features small in proportion to the entire countenance, the greater part of which is made up of an ample and rounded forehead and a somewhat abundant mouth and chin. The general impression is that rather of rich, fine, and very mobile tissue, than of large or decided bone. This, together with the length

of the upper lip, and the absence of any set expression, imparts to the face an air of lax and luxurious calmness. It is clearly a passive face rather than an active face, a face across which moods may pass and repass rather than a face grooved and charactered into any one permanent show of relation to the outer world. Placed beside the mask of Cromwell, it would fail to impress, not only as being less massive and energetic, but also as being in every way less marked and determinate. It is the face, we repeat, of a literary man, one of those faces which depend for their power to impress less on the sculptor's favourite circumstance of distinct osseous form than on the changing hue and aspect of the living flesh. And yet it is, even in form, quite a peculiar face. Instead of being, as in the ordinary thousand and one portraits of Shakespeare, a mere general face which anybody or nobody might have had, the face in the mask (and the singular portrait in the first folio edition of the poet's works corroborates it) is a face which every call-boy about the Globe Theatre must have carried about with him in his imagination, without any trouble, as specifically Mr. Shakespeare's face. In complexion, as we imagine it, it was rather fair than dark; and yet not very fair either, if we are to believe Shakespeare himself (Sonnet 62)—

“ But when my glass shows me myself indeed,  
Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity—”

---

a passage, however, in which, from the nature of the mood in which it was written, we are to suppose exaggeration for the worse. In short, the face of Shakespeare, so far as we can infer what it was from the homely Stratford bust, was a genuine and even comely, but still unusual, English face, distinguished by a kind of ripe intellectual fulness in the general outline, comparative smallness in the individual features, and a look of gentle and humane repose.

Goethe's face is different. The whole size of the head is perhaps less, but the proportion of the face to the head is greater, and there is more of that determinate form which arises from prominence and strength in the bony structure. The features are individually larger, and present in their combination more of that deliberate beauty of outline which can be conveyed with effect in sculpture. The expression, however, is also that of calm intellectual repose; and, in the absence of harshness or undue concentration of the parts, one is at liberty to discover the proof that this also was the face of a man whose life was spent rather in a career of thought and literary effort than in a career of active and laborious strife. Yet the face, with all its power of fine susceptibility, is not so passive as that of Shakespeare. Its passiveness is more the passiveness of self-control, and less that of natural constitution; the susceptibilities pass and repass over a firmer basis of permanent

---

character; the tremors among the nervous tissues do not reach to such depths of sheer nervous dissolution, but sooner make impact against the solid bone. The calm in the one face is more than of habitual softness and ease of humour; the calm in the other is more than of dignified, though tolerant, self-composure. It would have been more easy, one thinks, to take liberties with Shakespeare in his presence than to attempt a similar thing in the presence of Goethe. The one carried himself with the air of a man often diffident of himself, and whom, therefore, a foolish or impudent stranger might very well mistake till he saw him roused; the other wore, with all his kindness and blandness, a fixed stateliness of mien and look that would have checked undue familiarity from the first. Add to all this that the face of Goethe, at least in later life, was browner and more wrinkled; his hair more dark; his eye also nearer the black and lustrous in species, if less mysteriously vague and deep; and his person perhaps the taller and more symmetrically made.<sup>1</sup>

But a truce to these guesses! What do we actually know respecting those two men, whose masks, the preserved similitudes of the living features with which they once fronted the world, are now before us? Let us turn first to the one and then to the other, till, as

<sup>1</sup> According to Mr. Lewes, in his Life of Goethe, it is a mistake toancy that Goethe was tall. He seemed taller than he really was.

---

we gaze at these poor eyeless images, which are all we now have, some vision of the lives and minds they typify shall swim into our ken.

Shakespeare, this Englishman who died two hundred and sixty years ago, what is he now to us his countrymen, who ought to know him best? A great name, in the first place, of which we are proud! That this little foggy island of England should have given birth to such a man is of itself a moiety of our acquittance among the nations. By Frenchmen Shakespeare is accepted as at least equal to their own first; Italians waver between him and Dante; Germans, by race more our brethren, worship him as their own highest product too, though born by chance amongst us. All confess him to have been one of those great spirits, occasionally created, in whom the human faculties seem to have reached that extreme of expansion on the slightest increase beyond which man would burst away into some other mode of being and leave this behind. And why all this? What are the special claims of Shakespeare to this high worship? Through what mode of activity, practised while alive, has he won this immortality after he is dead? The answer is simple. He was an artist, a poet, a dramatist. Having, during some five-and-twenty years of a life not very long, written about forty dramatic pieces, which, after being acted

---

in several London theatres, were printed either by himself or by his executors, he has, by this means, bequeathed to the memory of the human race an immense number of verses, and to its imagination a great variety of ideal characters and creations—Lears, Othellos, Hamlets, Falstaffs, Shallows, Imogens, Mirandas, Ariels, Calibans. This, understood in its fullest extent, is what Shakespeare has done. Whatever blank in human affairs, as they now are, would be produced by the immediate withdrawal of all this intellectual capital, together with all the interest that has been accumulated on it: *that* is the measure of what the world owes to Shakespeare.

This conception, however, while it serves vaguely to indicate to us the greatness of the man, assists us very little in the task of defining his character. In our attempts to do this—to ascend, as it were, to the living spring from which have flowed those rich poetic streams—we unavoidably rely upon two kinds of authority: the records which inform us of the leading events of his life; and the casual allusions to his person and habits left us by his contemporaries.

To enumerate the ascertained events of Shakespeare's life is unnecessary here. How he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, in April, 1564, the son of a respectable burgess who afterwards became poor; how, having been educated with some care in his native

---

town, he married there, at the age of eighteen, a farmer's daughter eight years older than himself; how, after employing himself as scrivener or schoolmaster, or something of that kind, in his native county for a few years more, he at length quitted it in his twenty-fourth year, and came up to London, leaving his wife and three children at Stratford; how, connecting himself with the Blackfriars theatre, he commenced the career of a poet and play-writer; how he succeeded so well in this that, after having been a flourishing actor and theatre-proprietor, and a most popular man of genius about town for some seventeen years, he was able to leave the stage while still under forty, and return to Stratford with property sufficient to make him the most considerable man of the place; how he lived here for some twelve years more in the midst of his family, sending up occasionally a new play to town, and otherwise leading the even and tranquil existence of a country gentleman; and how, after having buried his old mother, married his daughters, and seen himself a grandfather at the age of forty-three, he was cut off rather suddenly near his fifty-third birthday, in the year 1616:—all this is, or ought to be, as familiar to educated Englishmen of the present day as the letters of the English alphabet. M. Guizot, with a little inaccuracy, has made these leading facts in the life of the English poet tolerably familiar even to our French neighbours.

---

But, while such facts, if conceived with sufficient distinctness, serve to mark out the life of the poet in general outline, it is rather from the few notices of him that have come down to us from his contemporaries that we derive the more special impressions regarding his character and ways with which we are accustomed to fill up this outline. These notices are various; those of interest may, perhaps, be about a dozen in all; but the only ones that take a very decided hold on the imagination are the three following:—

*Fuller's Fancy-picture of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern.*—“Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.”—Written, about 1650, by Thomas Fuller, born in 1608.

*Aubrey's Sketch of Shakespeare at second hand.*—“This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess, about 18; and was an actor at one of the play-houses, and did act exceedingly well. (Now B. Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor.) He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low; and his plays took well. He was a handsome, well-shaped man; very good company, and of a very ready

and pleasant smooth wit. The humour of the constable in '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*', he happened to take at Grendon, in Bucks, which is the road from London to Stratford; and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxon. Mr. Jos. Howe is of that parish; and knew him. Ben Jonson and he did gather humours of men daily wherever they came. . . . He was wont to go to his native country once a year. I think I have been told that he left 200*l.* or 300*l.* per annum, there and thereabout, to a sister. I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell, who is accounted the best comedian we have now, say that he had a most prodigious wit, and did admire his natural parts beyond all other dramatical writers. He was wont to say that he never blotted out a line in his life. Said Ben Jonson, 'I wish he had blotted out a thousand.'—*Written, about 1680, by John Aubrey, born 1625.*

*Ben Jonson's own Sketch of Shakespeare.*—“I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been ‘Would he had blotted a thousand!'; which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour: for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: ‘Suffla-

*minandus erat*,' as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power ; would the rule of it had been so too ! Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter ; as when he said, in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him, 'Cæsar, thou dost me wrong,' he replied, 'Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause,' and such like ; which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned."—*Ben Jonson's "Discoveries."*

It is sheer nonsense, with these and other such passages accessible to anybody, to go on repeating, as people seem determined to do, the hackneyed saying of the commentator Steevens, that "all that we know of Shakespeare is, that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon ; married and had children there ; went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote plays and poems ; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."<sup>1</sup> It is our own fault, and not the fault of the materials, if we do not know a great deal more about Shakespeare than that ; if we do not realize, for example, these distinct and indubitable facts about him—his

<sup>1</sup> This saying of Steevens, though still repeated in books, has lost its force with the public. The Lives of Shakespeare by Mr. Halliwell and Mr. Charles Knight, written on such different principles, have effectually dissipated the old impression. Mr. Knight, by his use of the principle of synchronism, and his accumulation of picturesque details, in his Biography of Shakespeare, has left the public without excuse, if they still believe in Steevens.

---

special reputation among the critics of his time, as a man not so much of erudition as of prodigious natural genius ; his gentleness and openness of disposition ; his popular and sociable habits ; his extreme ease, and, as some thought, negligence in composition ; and, above all, and most characteristic of all, his excessive fluency in speech. "He sometimes required stopping," is Ben Jonson's expression ; and whoever does not see a whole volume of revelation respecting Shakespeare in that single trait has no eye for seeing anything. Let no one ever lose sight of that phrase in trying to imagine Shakespeare.

Still, after all, we cannot be content thus. With regard to such a man we cannot rest satisfied with a mere picture of his exterior in its aspect of repose, or in a few of its common attitudes. We seek, as the phrase is, to penetrate into his heart—to detect and to fix in everlasting portraiture that mood of his soul which was ultimate and characteristic ; in which, so to speak, he came ready-fashioned from the Creator's hands ; towards which he always sank when alone ; and on the ground-melody of which all his thoughts and actions were but voluntary variations. As far short of such a result as would be any notion we could form of the poet Burns from a mere chronological outline of his life, together with a few stories such as are current about his moral irregularities, so far short of a true apprecia-

---

tion of Shakespeare would be that idea of him which we could derive from the scanty fund of the external evidence.

And here it is that, in proceeding to make up the deficiency of the external evidence by going to the only other available source of light on the subject, namely the bequeathed writings of the man himself, we find ourselves obstructed at the outset by an obvious difficulty, which does not exist to the same extent in most other cases. We can, with comparative ease, recognise Burns himself in his works; for Burns is a lyrist, pouring out his own feelings in song, often alluding to himself, and generally under personal agitation when he writes. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is a dramatist, whose function it was not to communicate, but to create. Had he been a dramatist of the same school as Ben Jonson, indeed—using the drama as a means of spreading, or, at all events, as a medium through which to insinuate, his opinions, and often indicating his purposes by the very names of his *dramatis personæ* (as Downright, Merecraft, Eitherside, and the like)—then the task would have been easier. But it is not so with Shakespeare. Less than almost any man that ever wrote does he inculcate or dogmatise. He is the very type of the poet. He paints, represents, creates, holds the mirror up to nature; but from opinion, doctrine, controversy, theory, he holds instinctively aloof. In each

of his plays there is a “central idea,” to use the favourite term of the German critics—that is, a single thought round which all may be exhibited as consciously or unconsciously crystallized ; but there is no pervading maxim, no point set forth to be argued or proved. Of none of all the plays can it be said that it is more than any other a vehicle for fixed articles in the creed of Shakespeare.

One quality or attribute of Shakespeare’s genius we do, indeed, contrive to seize out this very difficulty of seizing anything—that quality or attribute of *many-sidedness* of which we have heard so much for the last century and a half. The immense variety of his characters and conceptions, embracing as it does Hamlets and Falstaffs, Kings and Clowns, Prosperos and Dogberrys, and his apparently equal ease in handling them all, are matters that have been noted by one and all of the critics. And thus, while his own character is lost in his incessant shiftings through such a succession of masks, we yet manage, as it were in revenge, to extract from the very impossibility of describing him an adjective which does possess a kind of quasi-descriptive value. It is as if of some one that had baffled all our attempts to investigate him we were to console ourselves by saying that he was a perfect Proteus. We call Shakespeare “many-sided ;” not a magazine, nor a young lady at a party, but tells you

that; and in adding this to our list of adjectives concerning him we find a certain satisfaction, and even an increase of light.

But it would be cowardice to stop here. The old sea-god Proteus himself, despite his subtlety and versatility, had a real form and character of his own, into which he could be compelled, if one only knew the way. Hear how they served this old gentleman in the *Odyssey*:

“ We at once,  
Loud shouting, flew on him, and in our arms  
Constrained him fast ; nor the sea-prophet old  
Called not incontinent his shifts to mind.  
First he became a long-maned lion grim ;  
A dragon then, a panther, a huge boar,  
A limpid stream, and an o'ershadowing tree.  
We, persevering, held him ; till, at length,  
The subtle sage, his ineffectual arts  
Resigning weary, questioned me and spoke.”

And so with *our* Proteus. The many-sidedness of the dramatist, let it be well believed and pondered, is but the versatility in form of a certain personal and substantial being, which constitutes the specific mind of the dramatist himself. Precisely as we have insisted that Shakespeare's face, as the best portraits represent it to us, is no mere general face or face to let, but a good, decided, and even rather singular face, so, we would insist, he had as specific a character, as

thoroughly a way of his own in thinking about things and going through his morning and evening hours, as any of ourselves. "Man is only many-sided," says Goethe, "when he strives after the highest because he *must*, and descends to the lesser because he *will*;" that is, as we interpret, when he is borne on in a certain noble direction in all that he does by the very structure of his mind, while, at his option, he may keep planting this fixed path or not with a sportive and flowery border. By the necessity of his nature, Shakespeare was compelled in a certain earnest direction in all that he did; and it is our part to search through the thickets of imagery and gratuitous fiction amid which he spent his life, that this path may be discovered. As the lion, or the limpid stream, or the overshadowing tree, into which Proteus turned himself, was not a real lion, or a real stream, or a real tree, but only Proteus as the one or as the other; so, involved in each of Shakespeare's characters,—in Hamlet, in Falstaff, or in Romeo,—involved in some deep manner in each of these diverse characters, is Shakespeare's own nature. If Shakespeare had not been precisely and wholly Shakespeare, and not any other man actual or conceivable, could Hamlet or Falstaff, or any other of his creations, have been what they are?

But how to evolve Shakespeare from his works, how to compel this Proteus into his proper and native form,

---

is still the question. It is a problem of the highest difficulty. Something, indeed, of the poet's personal character and views we cannot help gathering as we read his dramas. Passages again and again occur of which, from their peculiar effect upon ourselves, from their conceivable reference to what we know of the poet's circumstances, or from their evident superfluousness and warmth, we do not hesitate to aver "There speaks the poet's own heart." But to show generally how much of the man has passed into the poet, and how it is that his personal bent and peculiarities are to be surely detected inhering in writings whose essential character it is to be arbitrary and universal, is a task from which a critic might well shrink, were he left merely to the ordinary resources of critical ingenuity without any positive and ascertained clue.

In this case, however, all the world ought to know, there *is* a positive and ascertained clue. Shakespeare has left to us not merely a collection of dramas, the exercises of his creative phantasy in a world of ideal matter, but also certain poems which are assuredly and expressly autobiographic. Criticism seems now pretty conclusively to have determined, what it ought to have determined long ago, that the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare are, and can possibly be, nothing else than a poetical record of his own feelings and experience—a connected series of entries, as it were, in his own diary

—during a certain period of his London life. This, we say, is conclusively determined and agreed upon; and whoever does not, to some extent, hold this view knows nothing about the subject. Ulrici, who is a genuine investigator, as well as a profound critic, is, of course, right on this point. So, also, in the main, is M. Guizot, although he mars the worth of the conclusion by adducing the foolish theory of *Euphuism*—that is, of the adoption of an affected style of expression in vogue in Shakespeare's age—in order to explain away that which is precisely the most important thing about the Sonnets, and the very thing *not* to be explained away: namely, the depth and strangeness of their pervading sentiment, and the curious hyperbolism of their style. In truth, it is the very closeness of the contact into which the right view of the Sonnets brings us with Shakespeare, the very value of the information respecting him to which it opens the way, that operates against it. Where we have so eager a desire to know, there we fear to believe, lest what we have once cherished on so great a subject we should be obliged again to give up, or lest, if our imaginations should dare to figure aught too exact and familiar regarding the traits and motions of so royal a spirit, the question should be put to us, what *we* can know of the halls of a palace, or the mantled tread of a king? Still the fact is as it is. These Sonnets of Shakespeare *are* autobiographic—distinctly,

---

intensely, painfully autobiographic, although in a style and after a fashion of autobiography so peculiar that we can cite only Dante in his *Vita Nuova*, and Tennyson in his *In Memoriam*, as having furnished similar examples of it.

We are not going to examine the Sonnets in detail here, nor to tell the story which they involve as a whole. We will indicate generally, however, the impression which, we think, a close investigation of them will infallibly leave on any thoughtful reader, as to the characteristic personal qualities of that mind the larger and more factitious emanations from which still cover and astonish the world.

The general and aggregate effect, then, of these Sonnets, as contributing to our knowledge of Shakespeare as a man, is to antiquate, or at least to reduce very much in value, the common idea of him implied in such phrases as William the Calm, William the Cheerful, and the like. These phrases are true, when understood in a certain very obvious sense; but, if we were to select that designation which would, as we think, express Shakespeare in his most intimate and private relations to man and nature, we should rather say William the Meditative, William the Metaphysical, or William the Melancholy. Let not the reader, full of the just idea of Shakespeare's wonderful concreteness as a poet, be staggered by the second of these phrases.

The phrase is a good phrase ; etymologically, it is perhaps the best phrase we could here use ; and whatever of inappropriateness there may seem to be in it proceeds from false associations, and will vanish, we hope, before we have done with it. Nor let it be supposed that, in using, as nearly synonymous, the word Melancholy, we mean anything so absurd as that the author of Falstaff was a Werther. What we mean is that there is evidence in the Sonnets, corroborated by other proof on all hands, that the mind of Shakespeare, when left to itself, was apt to sink into that state in which thoughts of what is sad and mysterious in the universe most easily come and go.

At no time, except during sleep, is the mind of any human being completely idle. All men have some natural and congenial mood into which they fall when they are left to talk with themselves. One man recounts the follies of the past day, renewing the relish of them by the recollection ; another uses his leisure to hate his enemy and to scheme his discomfiture ; a third rehearses in imagination, in order to be prepared, the part which he is to perform on the morrow. Now, at such moments, as we believe, it was the habit of Shakespeare's mind, obliged thereto by the necessity of its structure, to ponder ceaselessly those questions relating to man, his origin, and his destiny, in familiarity with which consists what is called the spiritual element

in human nature. It was Shakespeare's use, as it seems to us, to revert, when he was alone, to that ultimate mood of the soul in which one hovers wistfully on the borders of the finite, vainly pressing against the barriers that separate it from the unknown ; that mood in which even what is common and under foot seems part of a vast current mystery, and in which, like Arabian Job of old, one looks by turns at the heaven above, the earth beneath, and one's own moving body between, interrogating whence it all is, why it all is, and whither it all tends. And this, we say, is Melancholy. It is more. It is that mood of man, which, most of all moods, is thoroughly, grandly, specifically human. That which is the essence of all worth, all beauty, all humour, all genius, is open or secret reference to the supernatural ; and this is sorrow. The attitude of a finite creature, contemplating the infinite, can only be that of an exile, grief and wonder blending in a wistful longing for an unknown home.

As we consider this frame of mind to have been characteristic of Shakespeare, so we find that as a poet he has not forgotten to represent it. We have always fancied Hamlet to be a closer translation of Shakespeare's own character than any other of his personations. The same meditativeness, the same morbid reference at all times to the supernatural, the same inordinate development of the speculative faculty, the

---

same intellectual melancholy, that are seen in the Prince of Denmark, seem to have distinguished Shakespeare. Nor is it possible here to forget that minor and lower form of the same fancy—the ornament of *As You Like It*, the melancholy Jaques.

“*Jaques*. More, more, I prithee, more.

*Amiens*. It will make you melancholy, Monsieur Jaques.

*Jaques*. I thank it. More, I prithee, more ! I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs. More, I prithee, more !

*Amiens*. My voice is ragged ; I know I cannot please you.

*Jaques*. I do not desire you to please me ; I desire you to sing.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Rosalind*. They say you are a melancholy fellow.

*Jaques*. I am so ; I do love it better than laughing.

*Rosalind*. Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards.

*Jaques*. Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

*Rosalind*. Why, then, 'tis good to be a post.

*Jaques*. I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation ; nor the musician's, which is fantastical ; nor the courtier's, which is proud ; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious ; nor the lawyer's, which is politic ; nor the lady's, which is nice ; nor the lover's, which is all these : but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many

objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness."

Jaques is not Shakespeare ; but in writing this description of Jaques Shakespeare drew from his knowledge of himself. His also was a "melancholy of his own," a "humorous sadness in which his often rumination wrapt him." In that declared power of Jaques of "sucking melancholy out of a song" the reference of Shakespeare to himself seems almost direct. Nay more, as Rosalind, in rating poor Jaques, tells him on one occasion that he is so abject a fellow that she verily believes he is "out of love with his nativity, and almost chides God for making him of that countenance that he is," so Shakespeare's melancholy, in one of his Sonnets (No. 29), takes exactly the same form of self-dissatisfaction.

"When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
*Featured like him*, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least ;  
Yet, in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee," &c.

Think of that, reader ! That mask of Shakespeare's face, which we have been discussing, Shakespeare himself did not like ; and there were moments in which he was so abject as actually to wish that he had received from Nature another man's physical features !

If Shakespeare's melancholy was, like that of Jaques, a complex melancholy, a melancholy " compounded of many simples"—extracted perhaps at first from some root of bitter experience in his own life, and then fed, as his Sonnets clearly state, by a habitual sense of his own "outcast" condition in society, and by the sight of a hundred social wrongs around him, into a kind of abject dissatisfaction with himself and his fate—yet, in the end, and in its highest form, it was rather, as we have already hinted, the melancholy of Hamlet, a meditative, contemplative melancholy, embracing human life as a whole, the melancholy of a mind incessantly tending from the real (*τα φυσικα*) to the metaphysical (*τα μετα τα φυσικα*), and only brought back by external occasion from the metaphysical to the real.

Do not let us quarrel about the words, if we can agree about the thing. Let any competent person whatever read the Sonnets, and then, with their impression on him, pass to the plays, and he will inevitably become aware of Shakespeare's personal fondness for certain themes or trains of thought, particularly that of the speed and destructiveness of time.

Death, vicissitude, the march and tramp of generations across life's stage, the rotting of human bodies in the earth—these and all the other forms of the same thought were familiar to Shakespeare to a degree beyond what is to be seen in the case of any other poet. It seems to have been a habit of his mind, when left to its own tendency, ever to indulge by preference in that oldest of human meditations, which is not yet trite: “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble; he cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not.” Let us cite a few examples from the Sonnets:—

“ When I consider everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment.”—  
*Sonnet 15.*

“ If thou survive my well-contented clay,  
When that churl Death my bones with dust shall  
cover.”—  
*Sonnet 32.*

“ No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
Give warning to the world that I am fled  
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.”—  
*Sonnet 71*

“ The wrinkles, which thy glass will truly show,  
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;  
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth may'st know  
Time's thievish progress to eternity.”—  
*Sonnet 77.*

---

"Or I shall live your epitaph to make,  
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten."—

*Sonnet 81.*

These are but one or two out of many such passages occurring in the Sonnets. Indeed, it may be said that, whenever Shakespeare pronounces the words time, age, death, and the like, it is with a deep and cutting personal emphasis, quite different from the usual manner of poets in their stereotyped allusions to mortality. Time, in particular, seems to have tenanted his imagination as a kind of grim and hideous personal existence, cruel out of mere malevolence of nature. Death, too, had become to him a kind of actual being or fury, morally unamiable, and deserving of reproach: "that churl Death."

If we turn to the plays of Shakespeare, we shall find that in them too the same morbid sensitiveness to all associations with mortality is continually breaking out. The vividness, for example, with which Juliet describes the interior of a charnel-house partakes of a spirit of revenge, as if Shakespeare were retaliating, through her, upon an object horrible to himself:—

"Or hide me nightly in a charnel-house,  
O'ercovered quite with dead men's rattling bones,  
With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls."

More distinctly revengeful is Romeo's ejaculation at the tomb:—

“Thou détestable maw, thou womb of Death,  
Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,  
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open !”

And who does not remember the famous passage in *Measure for Measure*?—

“*Claudio.* Death is a fearful thing.  
*Isabella.* And shamed life is hateful.  
*Claudio.* Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot ;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod ; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbèd ice ;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world ; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and uncertain thoughts  
Imagine howling : 'tis too horrible !  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment,  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of Death.”

Again in the grave-digging scene in *Hamlet* we see the same fascinated familiarity of the imagination with all that pertains to churchyards, coffins, and the corruption within them.

“*Hamlet.* Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.  
*Horatio.* What's that, my lord ?

*Hamlet.* Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth ?

*Horatio.* E'en so.

*Hamlet.* And smelt so ? pah ! (*Puts down the skull.*)

*Horatio.* E'en so, my lord !

*Hamlet.* To what base uses we may return, Horatio ! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole ?

*Horatio.* 'Twere to reason too curiously to consider so.

*Hamlet.* No, faith, not a jot ; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it : as thus :—Alexander died ; Alexander was buried ; Alexander returneth to dust ; the dust is earth ; of earth we make loam ; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel ?

Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away :  
O that that earth which kept the world in awe  
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw !”

Observe how Shakespeare here defends, through Hamlet, his own tendency “too curiously” to consider death. To sum up all, however, let us turn to that unparalleled burst of language in the *Tempest*, in which the poet has defeated Time itself by chivalrously proclaiming to all time what Time can do :—

“And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

This, we contend, is no mere poetic phrenzy, inserted because it was dramatically suitable that Prospero should so express himself at that place ; it is the explosion into words of a feeling during which Prospero was forgotten, and Shakespeare swooned into himself. And what is the continuation of the passage but a kind of postscript, describing, under the guise of Prospero, Shakespeare's own agitation with what he had just written ?—

"Sir, I am vexed;  
Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled:  
Be not disturbed with my infirmity:  
If you be pleased, retire into my cell,  
And there repose : *a turn or two I'll walk,*  
*To still my beating mind.*"

To our imagination the surmise is that Shakespeare here laid down his pen, and began to pace his chamber, too agitated to write more that night.

In this extreme familiarity with the conception of mortality in general, and perhaps also in this extreme sensitiveness to the thought of death as a matter of personal import, all great poets, and possibly all great men whatever, have to some extent resembled Shakespeare. For these are the feelings of our common

nature on which religion and all solemn activity have founded and maintained themselves. Space and Time are the largest and the outermost of all human conceptions ; to stand, therefore, incessantly upon these extreme conceptions, as upon the perimeter of a figure, and to view all inwards from them, is the highest exercise of thought to which a human being can attain. Accordingly, in all great poets there may be discerned this familiarity of the imagination with the world figured as a poor little ball pendent in space and moving forward out of a dark past to a future of light or gloom. But in this respect Shakespeare exceeds them all ; and in this respect, therefore, no poet is more religious, more spiritual, more profoundly metaphysical, than he. Into an inordinate amount of that outward pressure of the soul against the perimeter of sensible things, infuse the peculiar *moral* germ of Christianity, and you have the religion of Shakespeare. Thus :—

“And our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”—*Tempest*.

Here the poetic imagination sweeps boldly round the universe, severing it as by a soft cloud-line from the infinite Unknown.

“Poor soul ! the centre of my sinful earth,  
Fooled by those rebel powers that lead thee ’stray ! ”

*Sonnet 146.*

---

Here the soul, retracting its thoughts from the far and physical, dwells disgustedly on itself.

“The dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns.”—*Hamlet*.

Here the soul, pierced with the new and awful thought of sin, wings out again towards the Infinite, and finds all dark.

“How would you be,  
If He, which is the top of judgment, should  
But judge you as you are?”—*Measure for Measure*.

Here the silver lamp of hope is hung up within the gloomy sphere, to burn softly and faintly for ever!

And so it is throughout Shakespeare’s writings. Whatever is special or doctrinal is avoided; all that intellectual tackling, so to speak, is struck away that would afford the soul any relief whatever from the whole sensation of the supernatural. Although we cannot, therefore, in honest keeping with popular language, call Shakespeare, as Ulrici does, the most Christian of poets, we believe him to have been the man in modern times who, breathing an atmosphere full of Christian conceptions, and walking amid a civilization studded with Christian institutions, had his whole being tied by the closest personal links to those highest generalities of the universe which the greatest minds in all ages have ever

pondered and meditated, and round which Christianity has thrown its clasp of gold.

Shakespeare, then, we hold to have been essentially a meditative, speculative, and even, in his solitary hours, an abject and melancholy man, rather than a man of active, firm, and worldly disposition. Instead of being a calm, stony observer of life and nature, as he has been sometimes represented, we believe him to have been a man of the gentlest and most troublesome affections, of sensibility abnormally keen and deep, full of metaphysical longings, liable above most men to self-distrust, despondency, and mental agitation from causes internal and external, and a prey to many secret and severe experiences which he did not discuss at the Mermaid tavern. This, we say, is no guess ; it is a thing certified under his own hand and seal. But, this being allowed, we are willing to agree with all that is said of him, by way of indicating the immense variety of faculties, dispositions, and acquirements, of which his character was built up. Vast intellectual inquisitiveness, the readiest and most universal humour, the truest sagacity and knowledge of the world, the richest and deepest capacity of enjoying all that life presented : all this, as applied to Shakespeare, is a mere string of undeniable commonplaces. The man, as we fancy him, who of all others trod the oftenest the extreme metaphysic walk which bounds our universe in, he was also the man of all others

---

who was related most keenly by every fibre of his being to all the world of the real and the concrete. Better than any man he knew life to be a dream ; with as vivid a relish as any man he did his part as one of the dreamers. If at one moment life stood before his mental gaze, an illuminated little speck or disc, softly rounded with mysterious sleep, the next moment this mere span shot out into an illimitable plain, whereon he himself stood—a plain covered with forests, parted by seas, studded with cities and huge concourses of men, mapped out into civilizations, over-canopied by stars. Nay, it was precisely because he came and went with such instant transition between the two extremes that he behaved so genially and sympathetically in the latter. It was precisely because he had done the metaphysic feat so completely once for all, and did not bungle on metaphysicizing bit by bit amid the real, that he stood forth in the character of the most concrete of poets. Life is an illusion, a show, a phantasm : well then, that is settled, and *I* belong to that section of the illusion called London, the seventeenth century, and woody Warwickshire ! So he may have said ; and he acted accordingly. He walked amid the woods of Warwickshire, and listened to the birds singing in their leafy retreats ; he entered the Mermaid tavern with Ben Jonson after the theatre was over, and found himself quite properly related, as one item in the illusion, to that

other item in it, a good supper and a cup of canary. He accepted the world as it was, rejoiced in its joys, was pained by its sorrows, reverenced its dignities, respected its laws, and laughed at its whimsies. It was this very strength and intimacy and universality of his relations to the concrete world of nature and life that caused in him that spirit of acquiescence in things as they were, that evident conservatism of temper, that indifference, or perhaps more, to the specific contemporary forms of social and intellectual movement, with which he has sometimes been charged as a fault. The habit of attaching weight to what are called abstractions, of metaphysicalizing bit by bit amid the real, is almost an essential feature in the constitution of men who are remarkable for their faith in social progress. It was precisely, therefore, because Shakespeare was such a votary of the concrete, because he walked so firmly on the green and solid sward of that island of life which he knew to be surrounded by a metaphysic sea, that this or that metaphysical proposal with respect to the island itself occupied him but little.

How, then, *did* Shakespeare relate himself to this concrete world of nature and life in which his lot had been cast? What precise function with regard to it, if not that of an active partisan of progress, did he accept as devolving naturally on *him*? The answer is easy. Marked out by circumstances, and by his own bent and

inclination, from the vast majority of men, who, with greater or less faculty, sometimes perhaps with the greatest, pass their lives in silence, appearing in the world at their time, enjoying it for a season, and returning to the earth again,—marked out from among these, and appointed to be one of those whom the whole earth should remember and think of; yet precluded, as we have seen, by his constitution and fortune, from certain modes of attaining to this honour—the special function which, in this high place, he saw himself called upon to discharge, and by the discharge of which he has ensured his place in perpetuity, was simply that of expressing what he felt and saw. In other words, Shakespeare was specifically and transcendently a literary man. To say that he was the greatest *man* that ever lived is to provoke a useless controversy, and comparisons that lead to nothing, between Shakespeare and Cæsar, Shakespeare and Charlemagne, Shakespeare and Cromwell; to say that he was the greatest *intellect* that ever lived, is to bring the shades of Aristotle and Plato, and Bacon and Newton, and all the other systematic thinkers, grumbling about us, with demands for a definition of intellect, which we are by no means in a position to give; nay, finally, to say that he is the greatest *poet* that the world has produced (a thing which we would certainly say, were we provoked to it,) would be unnecessarily to hurt the feelings of Homer and

Sophocles, Dante and Milton. What we will say, then, and challenge the world to gainsay, is that he was the greatest *expresser* that ever lived. This is glory enough, and it leaves the other questions open. Other men may have led, on the whole, greater and more impressive lives than he ; other men, acting on their fellows through the same medium of speech that he used, may have expended a greater power of thought, and achieved a greater intellectual effect, in one consistent direction ; other men, too (though this is very questionable), may have contrived to issue the matter which they did address to the world in more compact and perfect artistic shapes. But no man that ever lived said such splendid things on all subjects universally ; no man that ever lived had the faculty of pouring out on all occasions such a flood of the richest and deepest language. He may have had rivals in the art of imagining situations ; he had no rival in the power of sending a gush of the appropriate intellectual effusion over the image and body of a situation once conceived. From a jewelled ring on an alderman's finger to the most mountainous thought or deed of man or demon, nothing suggested itself that his speech could not envelope and enfold with ease. That excessive fluency which astonished Ben Jonson when he listened to Shakespeare in person astonishes the world yet. Abundance, ease, redundancy, a plenitude of word, sound, and imagery.

---

which, were the intellect at work only a little less magnificent, would sometimes end in sheer braggartism and bombast, are the characteristics of Shakespeare's style. Nothing is suppressed, nothing omitted, nothing cancelled. On and on the poet flows; words, thoughts, and fancies crowding on him as fast as he can write, all related to the matter on hand, and all poured forth together, to rise and fall on the waves of an established cadence. Such lightness and ease in the manner, and such prodigious wealth and depth in the matter, are combined in no other writer. How the matter was first accumulated, what proportion of it was the acquired capital of former efforts, and what proportion of it welled up in the poet's mind during and in virtue of the very act of speech, it is impossible to say; but this at least may be affirmed without fear of contradiction, that there never was a mind in the world from which, when it was pricked by any occasion whatever, there poured forth on the instant such a stream of precious substance intellectually related to it. By his powers of expression, in fact, Shakespeare has beggared all his posterity, and left mere practitioners of expression nothing possible to do. There is perhaps not a thought, or feeling, or situation, really common and generic to human life, on which he has not exercised his prerogative; and, wherever he has once been, woe to the man that comes after him! He has overgrown the

whole system and face of things like a universal ivy, which has left no wall uncovered, no pinnacle unclimbed, no chink unpenetrated. Since he lived the concrete world has worn a richer surface. He found it great and beautiful, with stripes here and there of the rough old coat seen through the leafy labours of his predecessors ; he left it clothed throughout with the wealth and autumnal luxuriance of his own unparalleled language.

This brings us, by a very natural connexion, to what we have to say of Goethe. For, if, with the foregoing impressions on our mind respecting the character and the function of the great English poet, we turn to the mask of his German successor and admirer, which has been so long waiting our notice, the first question must infallibly be What recognition is it possible that, in such circumstances, we can have left for *him* ? In other words, the first consideration that must be taken into account in any attempt to appreciate Goethe is that he came into a world in which Shakespeare had been before him. For a man who, in the main, was to pursue a course so similar to that which Shakespeare had pursued this was a matter of incalculable importance. Either, on the one hand, the value of all that the second man could do, if he adhered to a course very similar, must suffer from the fact that he was following in the

footsteps of a predecessor of such unapproachable excellence; or, on the other hand, the consciousness of this, if it came in time, would be likely to *prevent* too close a resemblance between the lives of the two men, by giving a special direction and character to the efforts of the second. Hear Goethe himself on this very point:—

“We discoursed upon English literature, on the greatness of Shakespeare, and on the unfavourable position held by all English dramatic authors who had appeared after that poetical giant. ‘A dramatic talent of any importance,’ said Goethe, ‘could not forbear to notice Shakespeare’s works; nay, could not forbear to study them. Having studied them, he must be aware that Shakespeare has already exhausted the whole of human nature in all its tendencies, in all its heights and depths, and that, in fact, there remains for him, the aftercomer, nothing more to do. And how could one get courage to put pen to paper, if one were conscious, in an earnest appreciating spirit, that such unfathomable and unattainable excellencies were already in existence? It fared better with me fifty years ago in my own dear Germany. I could soon come to an end with all that then existed; it could not long awe me, or occupy my attention. I soon left behind me German littérature, and the study of it, and turned my thoughts to life and to production. So on and on I went, in my own natural development, and on and on I fashioned the productions of epoch after epoch. And, at every step of life and development, my standard of ex-

---

cellence was not much higher than what at such a step I was able to attain. But, had I been born an Englishman, and had all those numerous masterpieces been brought before me in all their power at my first dawn of youthful consciousness, they would have overpowered me, and I should not have known what to do. I could not have gone on with such fresh light-heartedness, but should have had to bethink myself, and look about for a long time to find some new outlet.'”—*Eckermann's Conversations of Goethe*, i. pp. 114, 115.

All this is very clear and happily expressed. Most Englishmen that have written since Shakespeare *have* been overawed by the sense of his vast superiority ; and Goethe, if he had been an Englishman, would have partaken of the same feeling, and would have been obliged, as he says, to look about for some path in which competition with such a predecessor would have been avoided. Being, however, a German, and coming at a time when German literature had nothing so great to boast of but that an ardent young man could hope to produce something as good or better, the way was certainly open to him to the attainment, in his own nation, of a position analogous to that which Shakespeare had occupied in his. Goethe might, if he had chosen, have aspired to be the Shakespeare of Germany. Had his tastes and faculties pointed in that direction, there was no reason, special to his own nation, that would have made it very incumbent on him to thwart the tendency

of his genius and seek about for a new outlet in order to escape injurious comparisons. But, even in such circumstances, to have pursued a course *very* similar to that of Shakespeare, and to have been animated by a mere ambition to tread in the footsteps of that master, would have been death to all chance of a reputation among the highest. Great writers do not exclusively belong to the country of their birth ; the greatest of all are grouped together on a kind of central platform, in the view of all peoples and tongues ; and, as in this select assemblage no duplicates are permitted, the man who does never so well a second time that which the world has already canonized a man for doing once has little chance of being admitted to co-equal honours. More especially in the present case would too close a resemblance to the original, whether in manner or in purpose, have been regarded in the end as a reason for inferiority in place. As the poet of one branch of the great Germanic family of mankind, Shakespeare belonged indirectly to the Germans, even before they recognised him ; in him all the genuine qualities of Teutonic human nature, as well as the more special characteristics of English genius, were embodied once for all in the particular form which had chanced to be his ; and, had Goethe been, in any marked sense, only a repetition of the same form, he might have held his place for some time as the wonder of Germany, but,

as soon as the course of events had opened up the communication which was sure to take place at some time between the German and the English literatures, and so made his countrymen acquainted with Shakespeare, he would have lost his extreme brilliance, and become but a star of the second magnitude. In order, then, that Goethe might hold permanently a first rank even among his own countrymen, it was necessary that he should be a man of a genius quite distinct from that of Shakespeare, a man who, having or not having certain Shakespearian qualities, should at all events signalize such qualities as he had by a marked character and function of his own. And, if this was necessary to secure to Goethe a first rank in the literature of Germany, much more was it necessary to ensure him a place as one of the intellectual potentates of the whole modern world. If Goethe was to be admitted into this select company at all, it could not be as a mere younger brother of Shakespeare, but as a man whom Shakespeare himself, when he took him by the hand, would look at with curiosity, as something new in species, produced in the earth since his own time.

Was this, then, the case? Was Goethe, with all his external resemblance in some respects to Shakespeare, a man of such truly individual character, and of so new and marked a function, as to deserve a place among the highest, not in German literature alone, but in the

---

literature of the world as a whole ? We do not think that anyone competent to give an opinion will reply in the negative.

A glance at the external circumstances of Goethe's life alone (and what a contrast there is between the abundance of biographic material respecting Goethe and the scantiness of our information respecting Shakespeare!) will beget the impression that the man who led such a life must have had opportunities for developing a very unusual character. The main facts in the life of Goethe are :—that he was born at Frankfort-on-the-Main in 1749, the only surviving son of parents who ranked among the wealthiest in the town ; that, having been educated with extreme care, and having received whatever experience could be acquired by an impetuous student-life, free from all ordinary forms of hardship, first at one German town and then at another, he devoted himself, in accordance with his tastes, to a career of literary activity ; that, after unwinding himself from several love-affairs, and travelling for the sake of farther culture in Italy and other parts of Europe, he settled in early manhood at Weimar, as the intimate friend and counsellor of the reigning duke of that state ; that there, during a long and honoured life, in the course of which he married an inferior house-keeper kind of person, of whom we do not hear much, he prosecuted his literary enterprise with unwearied

industry, not only producing poems, novels, dramas, essays, treatises, and criticisms in great profusion from his own pen, but also acting, along with Schiller and others, as a director and guide of the whole contemporary intellectual movement of his native land; and that finally, having outlived all his famous associates, become a widower and a grandfather, and attained the position not only of the acknowledged king and patriarch of German literature, but also, as some thought, of the wisest and most serene intellect of Europe, he died so late as 1832, in the eighty-third year of his age. All this, it will be observed, is very different from the life of the prosperous Warwickshire player, whose existence had illustrated the early part of the seventeenth century in England; and it necessarily denoted, at the same time, a very different cast of mind and temper.

Accordingly, such descriptions as we have of Goethe from those who knew him best convey the idea of a character notably different from that of the English poet. Of Shakespeare personally we have but one uniform account—that he was a man of gentle presence and disposition, very good company, and of such boundless fluency and intellectual inventiveness in talk that his hearers could not always stand it, but had sometimes to whistle him down in his flights. In Goethe's case we have two distinct pictures.

---

In youth, as all accounts agree in stating, he was one of the most impetuous, bounding, enmui-dispelling natures that ever broke in upon a society of ordinary mortals assembled to kill time. "He came upon you," said one who knew him well at this period, "like a wolf in the night." The simile is a splendid one, and it agrees wonderfully with the more subdued representations of his early years given by Goethe himself in his *Autobiography*. Handsome as an Apollo and welcome everywhere, he bore all before him wherever he went, not only by his talent, but also by an exuberance of animal spirits which swept dulness itself along, took away the breath of those who relied on sarcasm and their cool heads, inspired life and animation into the whole circle, and most especially delighted the ladies. This vivacity became even, at times, a reckless humour, prolific in all kinds of mad freaks and extravagances. Whether this impetuosity kept always within the bounds of mere innocent frolic is a question which we need not here raise. Traditions are certainly afloat of terrible domestic incidents connected with Goethe's youth, both in Frankfort and in Weimar; but to what extent those traditions are founded on fact is a matter which we have never yet seen any attempt to decide upon evidence. More authentic for us, and equally significant, if we could be sure of our ability to appreciate them rightly, are the stories which Goethe himself

tells of his various youthful attachments, and the various ways in which they were concluded. In Goethe's own narratives of these affairs there is a confession of error, arising out of his disposition passionately to abandon himself to the feelings of the moment without looking forward to the consequences ; but whether this confession is to be converted by his critics into the harsher accusation of heartlessness and want of principle is a thing not to be decided by any general rule as to the matter of inconstancy, but by accurate knowledge in each case of the whole circumstances of that case. One thing these love-romances of Goethe's early life make clear—that, for a being of such extreme sensibility as he was, he had a very strong element of self-control. When he gave up Rica or Lilli, it was with tears, and no end of sleepless nights ; and yet he gave them up. Shakespeare, we believe (and there is an instance exactly in point in the story of his Sonnets), had no such power of breaking clear from connexions which his judgment disapproved. Remorse and return, self-reproaches for his weakness at one moment followed the next by weakness more abject than before—such, by his own confession, was the conduct, in one such case, of our more passive and gentle-hearted poet. Where Shakespeare was “past cure,” and “frantic-mad with evermore unrest,” Goethe but fell into “hypochondria,” which reason

---

and resolution enabled him to overcome. Goethe at twenty-five gave up a young, beautiful and innocent girl, from the conviction that it was better to do so. Shakespeare at thirty-five was the abject slave of a dark-complexioned woman, who was faithless to him, and whom he cursed in his heart. The sensibilities in the German poet moved from the first, as we have already said, over a firmer basis of permanent character.

It is chiefly, however, the Goethe of later life that the world remembers and thinks of. The bounding impetuosity is then gone; or rather it is kept back and restrained, so as to form a calm and steady fund of internal energy, capable sometimes of a flash and outbreak, but generally revealing itself only in labour and its fruits. What was formerly the beauty of an Apollo, graceful, light, and full of motion, is now the beauty of a Jupiter, composed, stately, serene. "What a sublime form!" says Eckermann, describing his first interview with him. "I forgot to speak for looking at him: I could not look enough. His face is so powerful and brown, full of wrinkles, and each wrinkle full of expression. And everywhere there is such nobleness and firmness, such repose and greatness. He spoke in a slow, composed manner, such as you would expect from an aged monarch." Such is Goethe, as he lasts now in the imagination of the world. Living among statues, books, and pictures; daily doing some-

thing for his own culture and for that of the world ; daily receiving guests and visitors, whom he entertained and instructed with his wise and deep, yet charming and simple, converse ; daily corresponding with friends and strangers, and giving advice or doing a good turn to some young talent or other—never was such a mind consecrated so perseveringly and exclusively to the service of *Kunst* and *Literatur*. One almost begins to wonder if it was altogether right that an old man should go on, morning after morning, and evening after evening, in such a fashion, talking about art and science and literature as if they were the only interests in the world, taking his guests into corners to have quiet discussions with them on these subjects, and always finding something new and nice to be said about them. Possibly, indeed, this is the fault of those who have reported him, and who only took notes when the discourse turned on what they considered the proper Goethean themes. But that Goethe far outdid Shakespeare in this conscious dedication of himself to a life of the intellect is as certain as the testimony of likelihood can make it. Shakespeare did enjoy his art ; it was what, in his pensive hours, as he himself hints, he enjoyed most ; and whatever of intellectual ecstasy literary production can bring must surely have been his in those hours when he composed *Hamlet* and the *Tempest*. But Shakespeare's was precisely one of those minds

---

whose strength is a revelation to themselves during the moment of its exercise, rather than a chronic ascertained possession ; and from this circumstance, as well as from the attested fact of his carelessness as to the fate of his compositions, we can very well conceive that literature and mental culture formed but a small part of the general system of things in Shakespeare's daily thoughts, and that he would have been absolutely ashamed of himself if, when anything else, from the state of the weather to the quality of the wine, was within the circle of possible allusion, he had said a word about his own plays. If he had not Sir Walter Scott's positive conviction that every man ought to be either a laird or a lawyer, casting in authorship as a mere addition if it were to be practised at all, he at least led so full and keen a life, and was drawn forth on so many sides by nature, society, and the unseen, that Literature, out of the actual moments in which he was engaged in it, must have seemed to him a mere bagatelle, a mere fantastic echo of not a tithe of life. In his home in London, or his retirement at Stratford, he wrote on and on, because he could not help doing so, and because it was his business and his solace ; but no play seemed to him worth a day of the contemporary actions of men, no description worth a single glance at the Thames or at the deer feeding in the forest, no sonnet worth the tear it was made to embalm. Literature was

by no means to him, as it was to Goethe, the main interest of life; nor was he a man so far master of himself as ever to be able to behave as if it were so, and to accept, as Goethe did, all that occurred as so much culture. Yet Shakespeare would have understood Goethe, and would have regarded him, almost with envy, as one of those men who, as being "lords and owners of their faces," and not mere "stewards," know how to husband Nature's gifts best.

"They that have power to hurt and will do none,  
That do not do the thing they most do shew,  
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,  
Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow,  
They rightly do inherit Heaven's graces,  
And husband nature's riches from expense;  
They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
Others but stewards of their excellence."—*Sonnet 94.*

If Goethe attained this character, however, it was not because, as it is the fashion to say, he was by nature cold, heartless, and impassive, but because, uniting will and wisdom to his wealth of sensibilities, he had disciplined himself into what he was. A heartless man does not diffuse geniality and kindness around him, as Goethe did; and a statue is not seized, as Goethe once was, with haemorrhage in the night, the result of suppressed grief.

That which made Goethe what he was—namely, his philosophy of life—is to be gathered, in the form of hints, from his various writings and conversations. We present a few important passages here, in what seems their philosophic connexion, as well as the order most suitable for bringing out Goethe's mode of thought in contrast with that of Shakespeare.

*Goethe's Thoughts of Death.*—“We had gone round the thicket, and had turned by Tiefurt into the Weimar-road, where we had a view of the setting sun. Goethe was for a while lost in thought; he then said to me, in the words of one of the ancients,

‘Untergchend sogar ist's immer dieselbige Sonne.’  
(Still it continues the self-same sun, even while  
it is sinking.)

‘At the age of seventy-five,’ continued he, with much cheerfulness, ‘one must, of course, think sometimes of death. But this thought never gives me the least uneasiness, for I am fully convinced that our spirit is a being of a nature quite indestructible, and that its activity continues from eternity to eternity. It is like the sun, which seems to set only to our earthly eyes, but which, in reality, never sets, but shines on unceasingly.’—*Eckermann's Conversations of Goethe*, vol. i. p. 161.

*Goethe's Maxim with respect to Metaphysics.*—“Man is born not to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible.”—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 272.

---

*Goethe's Theory of the intention of the Supernatural with regard to the Visible.*—“After all, what does it all come to? God did not retire to rest after the well-known six days of creation, but, on the contrary, is constantly active as on the first. It would have been for Him a poor occupation to compose this heavy world out of simple elements, and to keep it rolling in the sunbeams from year to year, if He had not the plan of founding a nursery for a world of spirits upon this material basis. So He is now constantly active in higher natures to attract the lower ones.”—*Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 426.

*Goethe's Doctrine of Immortality.*—“Kant has unquestionably done the best service, by drawing the limits beyond which human intellect is not able to penetrate, and leaving at rest the insoluble problems. What a deal have people philosophised about immortality! and how far have they got? I doubt not of our immortality, for nature cannot dispense with the *entelecheia*. But we are not all, in like manner, immortal; and he who would manifest himself in future as a great *entelecheia* must be one now. . . . To me the eternal existence of my soul is proved from my idea of activity. If I work on incessantly till my death, nature is bound to give me another form of existence when the present one can no longer sustain my spirit.”—*Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 193, 194, and p. 122.

*Goethe's Image of Life.*—“Child, child, no more! The coursers of Time, lashed, as it were, by invisible spirits, hurry on the light car of our destiny; and all that we can do is, in cool self-possession, to hold the reins with a firm hand, and to guide the wheels, now to the left, now

to the right, avoiding a stone here, or a precipice there. Whither it is hurrying, who can tell? and who, indeed, can remember the point from which it started?"—*Egmont*.

*Man's proper business.*—“It has at all times been said and repeated that man should strive to know himself. This is a singular requisition; with which no one complies, or indeed ever will comply. Man is by all his senses and efforts directed to externals—to the world around him; and he has to know this so far, and to make it so far serviceable, as he requires for his own ends. It is only when he feels joy or sorrow that he knows anything about himself, and only by joy or sorrow is he instructed what to seek and what to shun.”

—*Eckermann's Conversations of Goethe*, vol. ii. p. 180.

*The Abstract and the Concrete, and the Subjective and the Objective.*—“The Germans are certainly strange people. By their deep thoughts and ideas, which they seek in everything, and fix upon everything, they make life much more burdensome than is necessary. Only have the courage to give yourself up to your impressions; allow yourself to be delighted, moved, elevated—nay, instructed and inspired by something great; but do not imagine all is vanity if it is not abstract thought and idea. . . . It was not in my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything abstract. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensual, animated, charming, varied, hundred-fold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round off and elaborate such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impressions in

hearing or reading my representation of them. . . . A poet deserves not the name while he only speaks out his few subjective feelings ; but as soon as he can appropriate to himself and express the world he is a poet. Then he is inexhaustible, and can be always new ; while a subjective nature has soon talked out his little internal material, and is at last ruined by mannerism. People always talk of the study of the ancients ; but what does that mean, except that it says ‘ Turn your attention to the real world, and try to express it, for that is what the ancients did when they were alive ? ’ Goethe arose and walked to and fro, while I remained seated at the table, as he likes to see me. He stood a moment at the stove, and then, like one who has reflected, came to me, and, with his finger on his lips, said to me, ‘ I will now tell you something which you will often find confirmed in your own experience. All eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective ; on the other hand, all progressive eras have an objective tendency. Our present time is retrograde, for it is subjective ; we see this not merely in poetry, but also in painting and much besides. Every healthy effort, on the contrary, is directed from the inward to the outward world, as you will see in all great eras, which have been really in a state of progression, and all of an objective nature.’ ”—*Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 415, 416, and pp. 283, 284.

*Rule of Individual Activity.*—“ The most reasonable way is for every man to follow his own vocation to which he has been born and which he has learnt, and to avoid hindering others from following theirs. Let the shoemaker abide by his last, the peasant by his plough, and let the king know how to govern ; for this is also a

---

business which must be learned, and with which no one should meddle who does not understand it."—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 134.

*Right and Wrong: The habit of Controversy.*—“The end of all opposition is negation, and negation is nothing. If I call *bad* bad, what do I gain? But, if I call *good* bad, I do a great deal of mischief. He who will work aright must never rail, must not trouble himself at all about what is ill done, but only do well himself. For the great point is not to pull down, but to build up; and in this humanity finds pure joy.”—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 208.

*Goethe's own Relation to the Disputes of his Time.*—“You have been reproached,” remarked I, rather inconsiderately, ‘for not taking up arms at that great period [the war with Napoleon], or at least co-operating as a poet. ‘Let us leave that point alone, my good friend,’ returned Goethe. ‘It is an absurd world, which knows not what it wants, and which one must allow to have its own way. How could I take up arms without hatred, and how could I hate without youth? If such an emergency had befallen me when twenty years old, I should certainly not have been the last; but it found me as one who had already passed the first sixties. Besides, we cannot all serve our country in the same way; but each does his best, according as God has endowed him. I have toiled hard enough during half a century. I can say that, in those things which nature has appointed for my daily work, I have permitted myself no relaxation night or day, but have always striven, investigated, and done as much, and that as well, as I could. If everyone can say the same of himself, it will prove well with all.

I will not say what I think. There is

---

more ill-will towards me hidden beneath that remark than you are aware of. I feel therein a new form of the old hatred with which people have persecuted me, and endeavoured quietly to wound me, for years. I know very well that I am an eyesore to many; that they would all willingly get rid of me; and that, since they cannot touch my talent, they aim at my character. Now, it is said that I am proud; now, egotistical; now, immersed in sensuality; now, without Christianity; and now, without love for my native country and my own dear Germans. You have now known me sufficiently for years, and you feel what all that talk is worth. . . . The poet, as a man and citizen, will love his native land; but the native land of his *poetic* powers and *poetic* action is the good, noble, and beautiful: which is confined to no particular province or country, and which he seizes upon and forms wherever he finds them. Therein he is like the eagle, who hovers with free gaze over whole countries, and to whom it is of no consequence whether the hare on which he pounces is running in Prussia or in Saxony."—*Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 257, 258, and p. 427.

Whoever has read these sentences attentively, and penetrated their meaning in connexion, will see that they reveal a mode of thought somewhat resembling that which we have attributed to Shakespeare, and yet essentially different from it. Both poets are distinguished by this, that they abstained systematically during their lives from the abstract, the dialectical, and the controversial, and devoted themselves, with true feeling and enjoyment, to the concrete, the real, and the unques-

tioned; and so far there is an obvious resemblance between them. But the manner in which this characteristic was attained was by no means the same in both cases. In Shakespeare, as we have seen, there was a metaphysical longing, a tendency towards the supersensible and invisible, absolutely morbid, if we take ordinary constitutions as the standard of health in this respect; and, if, with all this, he revelled with delight and moved with ease and firmness in the sensuous and actual, it was because the very same soul which pressed with such energy and wailing against the bounds of this life of man was also related with inordinate keenness and intimacy to all that this life spheres in. In Goethe, on the other hand, the tendency to the real existed under easier constitutional conditions, and in a state of such natural preponderance over any concomitant craving for the metaphysical, that it necessarily took, German though he was, a higher place in his estimate of what is desirable in a human character. That world of the real in which Shakespeare delighted, and which he knew so well, seemed to him, all this knowledge and delight notwithstanding, far more evanescent, far more a mere filmy show, far less considerable a shred of all that is, than it did to Goethe. To Shakespeare, as we have already said, life was but as a little island on the bosom of a boundless sea: men must needs know what the island contains, and act as those who have to till and

---

rule it; still, with that expanse of waters all round in view, and that roar of waters ever in the ear, what can men call themselves or pretend their realm to be? "Poor fools of Nature" is the poet's own phrase—the realm so small that it is pitiful to belong to it! Not so with Goethe. To him also, of course, the thought was familiar of a vast region of the supersensible outlying nature and life; but a higher value on the whole was reserved for nature and life, even on the universal scale, by his peculiar habit of conceiving them, not as distinct from the supersensible and contemporaneously begirt by it, but rather, if we may so speak, as a considerable portion, or even duration, of the *quondam*-supersensible in the new form of the sensible. In other words, Goethe was full of the notion of progress or evolution; the world was to him not a mere spectacle and dominion for the supernatural, but an actual manifestation of the substance of the supernatural itself, on its way through time to new issues. Hence his peculiar notion of immortality; hence his view as to the mere relativity of the terms right and wrong, good and bad, and the like; and hence also his resolute inculcation of the doctrine, so unpalatable to his countrymen, that men ought to direct their thoughts and efforts to the actual and the outward. Life being the current phase of the universal mystery, the true duty of men could be but to contribute in their various ways to the furtherance of life.

And what then, finally, was Goethe's *own* mode of activity in a life thus defined in his general philosophy? Like Shakespeare, he was a literary man; his function was literature. Yes, but in what respect, otherwise than Shakespeare had done before him, did he fulfil this literary function in reference to the world he lived in and enjoyed? In the first place, as all know, he differed from Shakespeare in this, that he did not address the world exclusively in the character of a poet. Besides his poetry, properly so called, Goethe has left behind him numerous prose-writings, ranking under very different heads, abounding with such deep and wise maxims and perceptions, in reference to all things under the sun, as would have entitled him, even had he been no poet, to rank as a sage. So great, indeed, is Goethe as a thinker and a critic that it may very well be disputed whether his prose-writings, as a whole, are not more precious than his poems. But even if we set apart this difference, and regard the two men in their special character as poets or artists, a marked difference is still discernible. Hear Goethe's own definition of his poetical career and aim.

"Thus began that tendency from which I could not deviate my whole life through: namely, the tendency to turn into an image, into a poem, everything that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied me, and to come to some certain understanding with myself upon

it, that I might both rectify my conceptions of external things, and set my mind at rest about them. The faculty of doing this was necessary to no one more than to me, for my natural disposition whirled me constantly from one extreme to the other. All, therefore, that has been put forth by me consists of fragments of a great confession."—*Intimacy*, vol. i. p. 240.

Shakespeare's genius we defined to be the genius of universal expression, of clothing objects, circumstances, and feelings with magnificent language, of pouring over the image of any given situation, whether suggested from within or from without, an effusion of the richest intellectual matter that could possibly be related to it. Goethe's genius, as here defined by himself, was something different and narrower. It was the genius of translation from the subjective into the objective, of clothing real feelings with fictitious circumstance, of giving happy intellectual form to states of mind, so as to dismiss and throw them off. Let this distinction be sufficiently conceived and developed, and a full idea will be obtained of the exact difference between the literary many-sidedness attributed to Shakespeare and that also attributed to Goethe.

MILTON'S YOUTH.

## MILTON'S YOUTH.<sup>1</sup>

NEVER surely did a youth leave the academic halls of England more full of fair promise than Milton, when, at the age of twenty-three, he quitted Cambridge to reside at his father's house, amid the quiet beauties of a rural neighbourhood some twenty miles distant from London. Fair in person, with a clear fresh complexion, light brown hair which parted in the middle and fell in locks to his shoulders, clear grey eyes, and a well-knit frame of moderate proportions—there could not have been found a finer picture of pure and ingenuous English youth. And that health and beauty which distinguished his outward appearance, and the effect of which was increased by a voice surpassingly sweet and musical, indicated with perfect truth the qualities of the mind within. Seriousness, studiousness, fondness for flowers and music, fondness also for manly exercises in the open air, courage and resolution of character, combined

<sup>1</sup> *North British Review*, February 1852 :—“The Works of John Milton.” 8 vols. London: Pickering. 1851.

with the most maiden purity and innocence of life—these were the traits conspicuous in Milton in his early years. Of his accomplishments it is hardly necessary to take particular note. Whatever of learning, of science, or of discipline in logic or philosophy, the University at that time could give, he had duly and in the largest measure acquired. No better Greek or Latin scholar probably had the University in that age sent forth; he was proficient in the Hebrew tongue, and in all the other customary aids to a Biblical Theology; and he could speak and write well in French and Italian. His acquaintance, obtained by independent reading, with the history and with the whole body of the literature of ancient and modern nations, was extensive and various. And, as nature had endowed him in no ordinary degree with that most exquisite of her gifts, the ear and the passion for harmony, he had studied music as an art, and had taught himself not only to sing in the society of others, but also to touch the keys for his solitary pleasure.

The instruments which Milton preferred as a musician were, his biographers tell us, the organ and the bass-viol. This fact seems to us to be not without its significance. Were we to define in one word our impression of the prevailing tone, the characteristic mood and disposition of Milton's mind, even in his early youth, we should say that it consisted in a deep and habitual *seriousness*.

We use the word in none of those special and restricted senses that are sometimes given to it. We do not mean that Milton, at the period of his early youth with which we are now concerned, was, or accounted himself as being, a confessed member of that noble party of English Puritans with which he afterwards became allied, and to which he rendered such vast services. True, he himself tells us, in his account of his education, that "care had ever been had of him, with his earliest capacity, not to be negligently trained in the precepts of the Christian religion;" and in the fact that his first tutor, selected for him by his father, was one Thomas Young, a Scotchman of subsequent distinction among the English Puritans, there is enough to prove that the formation of his character in youth was aided expressly by Puritanical influences. But Milton, if ever in a denominational sense he could be called a Puritan (he wore his hair long, and in other respects did not conform to the usages of the Puritan party), could hardly, with any propriety, be designated as a Puritan in this sense, at the time when he left College. There is evidence that at this time he had not given so much attention, on his own personal account, to matters of religious doctrine as he afterwards bestowed. That seriousness of which we speak was, therefore, rather a constitutional seriousness, ratified and nourished by rational reflection, than the assumed temper of a sect. "A certain reservedness of

---

natural disposition, and a moral discipline learnt out of the noblest philosophy"—such, in Milton's own words, were the causes which, apart from his Christian training, would have always kept him, as he believed, above the vices that debase youth. And herein the example of Milton contradicts much that is commonly advanced by way of a theory of the poetical character.

Poets and artists generally, it is held, are and ought to be distinguished by a predominance of sensibility over principle, an excess of what Coleridge called the spiritual over what he called the moral part of man. A nature built on quicksands, an organization of nerve languid or tempestuous with occasion, a soul falling and soaring, now subject to ecstasies and now to remorses—such, it is supposed, and on no small induction of actual instances, is the appropriate constitution of the poet. Mobility, absolute and entire destitution of principle properly so called, capacity for varying the mood indefinitely rather than for retaining and keeping up one moral gesture or resolution through all moods: this, say the theorists, is the essential thing in the structure of the artist. Against the truth of this, however, as a maxim of universal application, the character of Milton, as well as that of Wordsworth after him, is a remarkable protest. Were it possible to place before the theorists all the materials which exist for judging of Milton's personal disposition as a young man,